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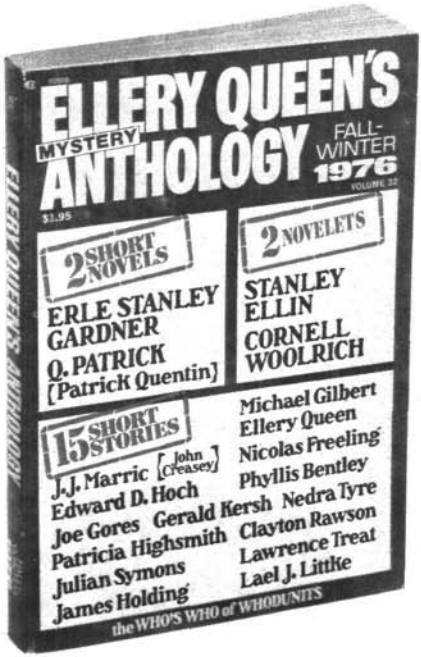


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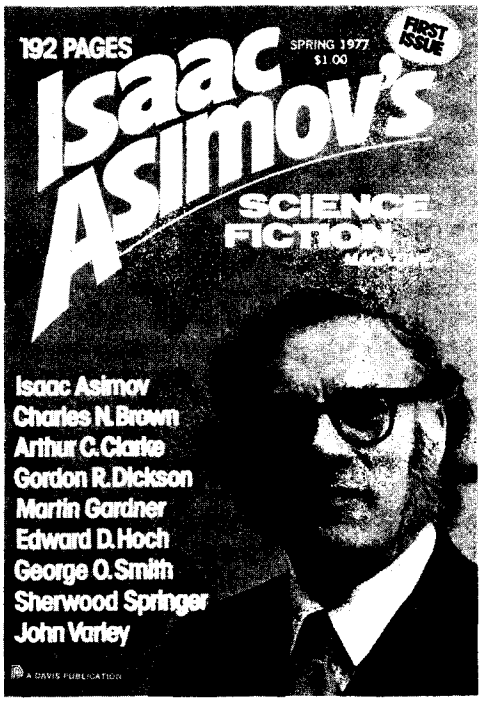


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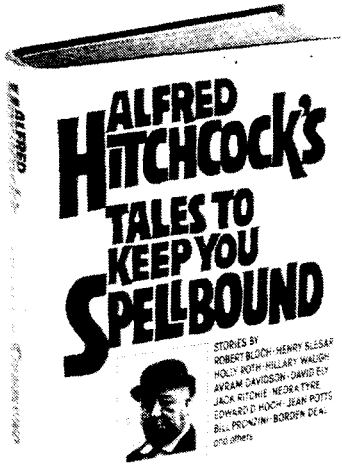
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**EDWARD D. HOCH**

*Nick Velvet, the unique thief, pilfers only the worthless, the valueless—never money or jewels or objets d'art—and his fee to filch zilch is $20,000. In this caper Nick is hired to steal—hold on to your deerstalker!—Sherlock Holmes's Persian slipper, the unlikely humidor in which The Master Detective kept his pipe tobacco. Need we say one word more?—except, as so often is the case in an Edward D. Hoch short story, there is as much action, as many twists and turns of plot, as are usually found in a novelet. . .*

# THE THEFT OF THE SHERLOCKIAN SLIPPER

**by EDWARD D. HOCH**

"Nick Velvet?"

The man who greeted him at the airport in Rome was dressed like Hollywood's idea of an American gangster. He'd been reading a copy of an English-language newspaper published daily in Italy, and he folded this under his arm as Nick approached. Obviously he knew he had the right man.

"That's me," Nick agreed. "Where's your boss?"

"He doesn't meet people at airports. I'll take you to his hotel."

They drove through the crowded Roman streets to a fancy hotel just a bit too Americanized with its plush décor and vague bustle. "I'll bet the boss loves it here," Nick said. "Just like New York."

The man ignored him and motioned toward the elevator. A few minutes later they were entering the suite of Joe Bonoto. "Velvet. Pleasure to meet you."

Nick shook the wrinkled hand. Joe Bonoto was older than he'd expected, an aged man living on memories of the past. Deported

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from the United States, he ruled a band of faithful followers in the hills of Sicily. To call them Mafia or even bandits was inaccurate. They were dedicated to no cause greater than the welfare of Joe Bonoto.

"I've come a long way," Nick told him.

"But your roots are here. In the old country."

"My roots are in the old Italian section of Greenwich Village. That's as far back as they go."

Joe Bonoto signaled for drinks. "You'll find the trip worthwhile. We want you to steal something."

"That's my business," Nick said, and indeed it was. Nick Velvet stole the unusual, the bizarre, the valueless. Never money or jewelry or objets d'art. "What is it?"

Joe Bonoto smiled. The surface of his face crinkled like a relief map. "A relic of Sherlock Holmes."

"Sherlock Holmes?"

The smile broadened. "There is a new ski resort in Meiringen, Switzerland, overlooking Reichenbach Falls. Naturally it has a Sherlock Holmes room, in honor of the place where Holmes and Moriarty fought to the death. Are you by any chance a Sherlockian, Velvet?"

"I read all of Conan Doyle's stories in my youth, but I haven't looked at them in years. I guess I can't be called a Sherlockian. Just what is this relic you want stolen?"

"Holmes's Persian slipper—the one in which he kept his pipe tobacco. It hangs near the fireplace in the Holmes room they have at Meiringen."

"There are other rooms like that," Nick pointed out. "I've read about one in London, and another somewhere else in Switzerland. I'm sure they all have Persian slippers on display. What makes this one so valuable?"

Bonoto spread his hands. "It is not valuable, Mr. Velvet! You do not steal valuable objects, do you?"

"Correct. But you brought me over from New York and you're willing to pay my fee of $20,000. It must be worth that much to you."

"For Sherlockians it has a sentimental value."

"Why not steal it yourself?"

"My men are too well-known to the police. You can catch a plane to New York and never be seen here again."

"All right," Nick agreed. He'd stolen stranger things in his

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time, with even less explanation. Besides, Switzerland might be a nice place to visit at this time of year.

His first sight of Reichenbach Falls was a breathtaking one, and he wished that Gloria had been there to see it too. A thin stream of white water dropped down from some unseen spot among the trees, hit an outcropping of rock, and changed into a broad cone of foam and mist. He'd expected something like Niagara, but this was utterly different—a fearful, coal-black abyss as sinister now as it had been the day Doctor Watson described it.

Nick remembered the story of Holmes and Moriarty at the falls, and he could well understand the desire of a new ski resort to cash in on the legend. In truth, the resort was some distance from the falls proper, on a hill that faced in the opposite direction. It was still too warm for skiing, and Nick had the place virtually to himself when he checked in.

"Here to see the falls?" a sandy-haired Englishman asked him in the lobby.

"Among other things. I drove up from Italy. Name's Nick Velvet."

"Mine's Cottonwood. Felix Cottonwood. I travel in tobacco."

"Tobacco?"

"My firm supplies tobacco products to many resorts in this area. I come around in the autumn and the spring to take orders."

Nick glanced around the lobby. "I understand they have a Sherlock Holmes room here."

"Right this way. It's a prime tourist attraction."

Cottonwood led him down a short passage to a cluttered sitting room fenced off by a low railing. Here indeed was the famous room at 221B Baker Street, with its bust of Holmes by the window, its bullet-pocked "V.R." on the wall, and—yes—its Persian slipper hanging by the fireplace.

"It seems complete in every detail," Nick said. "I'm surprised that souvenir hunters don't hop the railing and make off with things."

"There's an alarm system," Cottonwood answered casually. "But there's never any trouble like that. Sherlockians are content to come and look. Rooms like this are all they have that's new and exciting, unless someday someone comes up with Watson's fabled dispatch-box of unpublished cases."

They returned to the lobby and Nick excused himself to go to

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his room. He decided to wait till the following day before attempting to steal the slipper. The thing was too easy, too certain.

And the very simplicity of the assignment is what gave him doubts.

He spent the following day touring the area and getting to know the other off-season guests at the ski resort. He found time after lunch to take another look at the Sherlock Holmes room, this time noting especially the electric-eye alarms that criss-crossed the reconstruction of 221B Baker Street.

That night, when activity had settled down to a table of late drinkers in the resort's rustic bar, Nick made his move. He leaped quickly over the railing and carefully avoided the first of the electric-eye beams, using a misty aerosol spray that pinpointed their path without setting off the alarms. It was a trick he'd learned from a recent film, which proved an occasional Saturday night at the movies with Gloria need not be a total waste.

He crossed the second beam and reached out for the curved Persian slipper on its hook by the fireplace. He wondered if it really was filled with tobacco or if there might be something far more valuable inside—something to tempt a man like Joe Bonoto.

In a moment he would know.

"Hold it right there," a woman's voice said suddenly from behind him. "I have a gun pointed at the back of your neck."

He turned slowly, keeping his hands in sight, and saw that she was only a girl, surely still in her early twenties. She had a tiny automatic pointed at him, but it only added to her beauty—in a way that moviemakers had discovered long ago. She was dark, probably French, but her English had been learned in Britain if he was any judge of accents.

"I'm Nick Velvet," he said with a smile. "Who are you?"

Even against a gun he was more at ease with a beautiful girl than with a goon like Bonoto, and perhaps she sensed this. "My name is Annette—*don't move*—Annette DuFrois. I followed you here from Rome."

He silently cursed himself. It wasn't like him to travel all that distance without spotting a tail, especially a girl as pretty as Annette DuFrois. "What do you want?" he asked her, feeling just a bit foolish.

"To talk, right now. Come out of the room very carefully, without tripping the alarms. If any bells ring, I'll shoot you."

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"But—" He glanced back fondly at Holmes's Persian slipper, then decided it might be safer where it was for the present.

He negotiated the light beams with ease on the return trip, then walked ahead of the girl to the side exit. There was a moment when he might have disarmed her with ease, but he was curious now about her reason for following him. He decided to listen before he acted.

"Which way?" he asked when they were outside.

"Straight ahead. I have a car parked down the road."

"Is that it?" he asked, reaching a low-slung white sports car parked among the weeds.

For answer she poked his ribs with the gun. "Inside. The door's unlocked."

Nick bent almost double to fit under the low roof, and the girl followed him into the front seat. He felt the gun nudge him again. "All right, we're here. Now what is all this?"

"You're working for Joe Bonoto," she said. "I saw you at his hotel."

Nick didn't answer at once. A car passed them on the road and its headlights flickered for an instant on her face. "You have lovely eyes, Miss DuFrois."

She raised the gun an inch, otherwise ignoring his remark. "He hired you to steal something from that Sherlock Holmes exhibit, didn't he?"

"Does that concern you?"

"Joe Bonoto concerns me. A long time ago he caused the death of my brother."

The girl was much too young for anything to have happened to her brother too long ago, but Nick said, "Tell me about it."

"There's not much to tell. Richard was running with a bad crowd. He had a job as a courier for Joe Bonoto, and he was paid off in narcotics. Richard became hooked on heroin and died in Paris of an overdose." She stared off into space for a moment, as if remembering it. "I was twelve years old at the time, and I couldn't understand what was happening to him. I was with him when he died."

"That's a reason for you to risk your neck going up against Joe Bonoto?"

"It's reason enough for me. Somebody has to keep the Joe Bonotos of this world from taking over."

Nick wondered if he had ever been that young and idealistic.

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"You're too pretty to be a philosopher, especially a dead philosopher."

"Are you threatening me?"

"Joe Bonoto will threaten you, if you get in his way."

"I have the gun, remember. You'll do what I say."

"And what's that?"

"Where are you to meet Bonoto after you steal this thing?"

"I'm not. I'll pass it to one of his men." That wasn't strictly true, but he wasn't about to set up his client for a bullet before he'd been paid.

The subterfuge didn't work. Annette raised the gun another few inches, until it was pointed at Nick's chin. "Joe Bonoto doesn't work that way. He never did. He doesn't trust anyone, including you. He'll be close by, ready to show himself and collect the loot personally."

He knew she spoke the truth. "You want to kill him, don't you? I suppose you figure gunning him down up here in Switzerland is a lot easier than shooting up his hotel in Rome or his villa in Sicily."

"Perhaps."

"Well, you won't get any help from me."

"Then I suppose I'll have to shoot you," she said calmly.

"I suppose you will. I've got no great love for Joe Bonoto, but he is paying me. I'm not about to lure him into a trap."

Annette DuFrois smiled. "I'm not asking you to do that. If I kill you now, and hide your body, he'd show up here sooner or later—just to find out what happened to you."

Nick weighed the possibilities and decided it was time to move. They'd talked long enough. He measured the distance between them and decided he could easily reach her before she could fire a shot. There was always an instant's hesitation when an amateur was faced with the need to kill. And that instant was all he needed.

Nick moved.

He was almost on her when the gun exploded in his face, spraying his eyes and face with a stinging cloud of chemical Mace. He'd made one miscalculation—she hadn't planned to shoot him at all.

"You fool," she said, and brought the pistol down on his helpless head.

He woke to awareness slowly, and his first conscious thought was the realization that he was face down in damp grass that

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tickled his nose. Then he felt something kick him in the ribs and he rolled over. It was just beginning to get light, and he could make out the gangster type who'd met him at the Rome airport. The man was standing over him with a gun, and Joe Bonoto himself hovered in the background, half sitting in the front seat of his car with one hand on the open door.

"Get up, punk," the gangster type growled.

Nick staggered to his feet, still rubbing eyes that felt like burning coals. That damned girl, she'd dumped him from the car and left him by the side of the road!

"We waited for your call," Bonoto said quietly. "When we didn't hear anything we came looking for you. We checked the ski resort and then we spotted you out here."

"I had an accident," Nick mumbled.

"Yeah."

"Besides, I wasn't supposed to call till morning."

Joe Bonoto leaned down. "It was lonely waiting for you. I kept remembering I paid you half your fee already. What happened?"

"A car sideswiped me." His vision was clear at last and he had only a slight headache from the blow of Annette's gun.

"Where is the slipper?"

"Still back at the resort. I didn't have a chance to lift it yet."

"We pay you twenty thousand dollars so we can come up here and get it ourselves?"

"I'll get it," Nick assured them, but Bonoto had made his point. He was on the scene now, and Nick's only payment was likely to come from the barrel of a gun. "Just stay out of sight so you won't be recognized." *Or shot,* he might have added, remembering Annette.

"Can you get the slipper now, this morning?"

It was still early, and Nick knew the other resort guests wouldn't yet be prowling about. "I can try. Give me a half hour, then drive up the side road and I'll meet you there."

Joe Bonoto nodded. "No tricks."

Nick quickly realized that Annette had driven him some distance from the resort before dumping him out of the car. By the time he walked back, the sun was over the rim of the mountains, but except for a few employees there was still little sign of movement about the place. His car was where he'd left it, and there was no evidence that Annette had returned.

Once more he hurried down the corridor to the Sherlock Holmes

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room. All was as he remembered it, except for one thing.

The Persian slipper was gone from its hook beside the fireplace.

Nick glanced at his watch. He had twenty minutes before it would be time to meet Bonoto—twenty minutes to explain the slipper's disappearance. Had Annette returned to steal it? He hadn't mentioned what object he was after, but she might have guessed. Or been after it herself from the beginning.

On the other hand, Bonoto might have stolen it and simply saved himself twenty grand.

Nick let his eyes roam over the other objects before him in the Holmes room, but nothing else seemed to have changed. Only the slipper was missing. Someone—Bonoto or Annette or someone else—had negotiated the electric-eye beams and got away with it.

Nick went to the door of the resort and looked down the road. The car belonging to Bonoto had drawn nearer—it was parked just off the road under some trees. Watching it, he was aware of the utter silence of the morning. Only the distant roar of the waterfall—always present and therefore unnoticed—reached his ears.

It was almost as if the spirit of Sherlock Holmes himself had entered the resort and taken down the familiar Persian slipper to fill his calabash pipe.

He went back up to his room to get the gun from his suitcase. Joe Bonoto was not the most stable man on earth, and Nick wanted to be armed when he told him the slipper was missing. Downstairs now there was more activity, as some of the guests had appeared for breakfast. He waved to Felix Cottonwood and a few of the others he'd got to know. Then he went outside and started down the road to Bonoto's waiting car.

The first thing he saw was Bonoto's gunman, sprawled in the weeds to the right of the car. There was little blood, because the dry earth had soaked it up quickly.

Nick drew a deep breath and looked inside the car.

Joe Bonoto was slumped behind a windshield punctured by three spiderwebbed holes. He was an old man, and he hadn't even moved fast enough to die on his feet.

Nick walked away fast without touching anything. His first impulse was to drive to the nearest large airport and book a flight back to New York. The entire assignment had been a bust—the

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slipper was gone, his client was dead, and the police would surely be looking for him before long.

But then he remembered Annette DuFrois.

Just maybe something could be salvaged from this after all.

It took him till mid-afternoon to locate her, and long before that some morning strollers came upon the bodies of Bonoto and his bodyguard. Local police cars converged on the scene, with police from more distant points arriving as word of the murdered man's identity became known.

Nick made himself scarce while employees and guests were being questioned, and concentrated on finding Annette. It was her low white sports car that finally revealed her, when he spotted it parked at an inn on one of the winding country roads to the south. He pulled up behind it and slouched down in his seat, waiting.

Presently she appeared, wearing a trim yellow pants suit and carrying a shoulder bag that no doubt held her gun. Nick waited until she had one hand on the door handle and then jumped from his car. Startled, she tried for her purse, but he grabbed it and held it tight. "No more Mace in the face, please."

"How did you find me?"

"It took patience."

"Have you decided to help?"

"You don't need any help. Bonoto and his bodyguard are both dead, back at the resort."

The color drained from her face. "You think I did it?"

"You're a likely suspect. And someone else might have heard you threatening him. The police will surely be looking for your car if somebody remembers seeing it around the place last night."

She gazed into his face. "You're not lying to me? Bonoto is really dead?"

"He's really dead. Isn't it time we talked about your position in all this?"

"I didn't kill him."

"I know that," Nick said.

"You do?" She seemed surprised. "How?"

"It was very quiet just before they were killed—an early morning sort of quiet. At least four shots were fired, one for the bodyguard and three through the car windshield at Bonoto. Yet I heard nothing. That can only mean the killer used a silencer. And a silenced gun isn't the weapon of a woman who announces her

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intentions in advance, a woman bent on avenging a dead brother. You have a tiny gun that fires Mace, and you probably have one just as tiny for bullets. Bonoto was killed by a professional, someone using a large-caliber silenced weapon."

"Who?"

"Does it matter to you?"

"No, I suppose not. But I'm curious."

"I came to steal something for Bonoto, as you know."

"From the Sherlock Holmes exhibit?"

He nodded. "Someone beat me to it. I think that someone must also be the killer. He might have been escaping from the resort when he encountered Bonoto and was recognized."

"What is it that's so valuable?"

"The Persian slipper in which Holmes was said to have kept his tobacco."

"But—"

"Tobacco." He repeated the word slowly, and suddenly he remembered the unusual occupation of Mr. Felix Cottonwood.

Annette was at his side as they sped back up the hill to the resort. He left her car behind because it was too easily identified, and he didn't want the police stopping them now.

"But why would Cottonwood want the slipper?" she asked. "And why would he want to kill Bonoto?"

"That's what I intend to find out."

The police were still very much in evidence when they returned, and a Swiss officer stopped Nick's car at the entrance to the parking lot, allowing it to pass only after they'd identified themselves as guests. He looked first for Cottonwood in the bar, but the sandy-haired Englishman was nowhere in sight.

"He may have skipped already," Nick said, heading for the front desk. But as he was about to ask the clerk, he saw Felix Cottonwood emerge from an elevator.

"Well, it's Mr. Velvet, isn't it? And I don't believe I know the young lady."

Nick didn't bother with introductions. "It's important I talk with you, Cottonwood. I know about the slipper."

"Slipper?"

"The Sherlockian slipper you stole from the Holmes display."

"Now really, Velvet, I think you're going too far. I am a salesman, not a thief."

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"And what is it you sell?"

"I told you—tobacco products."

Nick glanced around the lobby, then pointed toward a secluded corner. "Let's go talk."

"If you must talk I prefer the open air. The police around here are quite unnerving."

Nick motioned Annette to wait for him and followed the Englishman outside. Now in the warmth of the afternoon sun there was a grandeur about the place that defied any attempt at description. As they walked together down the path toward Reichenbach Falls, he knew exactly the emotions Arthur Conan Doyle must have felt on seeing this place.

"This should be private enough," Nick said as they strolled.

Felix Cottonwood smiled. "Oh, yes. Even electronic listening devices would be helpless against the roar of those falls."

"Then suppose you tell me about the tobacco business. And especially about the tobacco in the toe of that Persian slipper. I suspect it's hash or hemp at the very least."

Cottonwood allowed himself a chuckle of mirth. "My good man, even if I dealt in drugs, which I do not, the toe of a slipper would hold barely enough for a dozen cigarettes."

They were closer to the falls now, and Nick could feel the spray on his face. Underfoot, the blackish soil was soft with moisture. "But you did steal the slipper, didn't you?"

"Be careful," the Englishman said. "This path is treacherous."

"Didn't you?" Nick repeated.

"Did I?"

"Your mind runs to electronic-listening devices, and probably to silenced pistols as well. Why did you kill Bonoto?"

Cottonwood sighed. "You're an exasperating man, Velvet. You chose the right criminal for the wrong reason. Yes, I killed Bonoto and his gunman, but it had nothing to do with narcotics—or even with tobacco, for that matter. It was only the slipper we were after, and what it contained."

"Which is—?"

Felix Cottonwood drew himself up, becoming for a moment the very model of a British gentleman. "There exists—and has always existed—one item of Sherlockiana more valuable than any other, and more elusive. Today, with the worldwide revival of interest in Holmes, it is not an exaggeration to say this one object could be worth a million dollars."

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"Yet it's small enough to be hidden in the toe of a Persian slipper?"

"Quite correct. There was no time to dig it free from the tobacco, so I removed the entire slipper from the room. It is, however, this object that I sought, that I pursued across half of Europe. At last an aged scholar told me where he'd hidden it—but unfortunately he also told others. Bonoto was planning to move in on the Sherlock Holmes business in exactly the manner that the American mob has moved into the distribution of pornography. This I could not allow. He hired you to keep his name out of it, but when I saw him there this morning I knew the truth. And I shot him."

"You're very frank," Nick said.

Felix Cottonwood smiled and turned on the narrow path. There was a mist of spray clinging to his face and eyebrows, and in his right hand he held a silenced pistol. "I'm sorry, Velvet. I was only frank because it didn't matter. I have to kill you too."

Nick saw death only seconds away as he lunged at the Englishman, then heard the gentle cough of the weapon's discharge. The shot went wild, and he gripped Cottonwood's wrist, forcing the gun into the air. It was no good yelling for the police—the roar of the falls muffled every sound.

They struggled for a moment and then Nick felt his feet sliding on the damp ground. He saw the edge of the chasm looming close.

He felt himself falling.

And then somehow he was clinging to a low bush at the edge of the path, and Felix Cottonwood was tumbling over him, tumbling and screaming into the black depths below.

Nick got unsteadily to his feet and tried to peer into the gorge, but there was nothing to see except the rising mists.

Cottonwood's pistol lay at the edge of the path where it had fallen. Nick picked it up and threw it into the abyss after its owner.

Annette DuFrois was waiting back at the resort. "What happened?" she asked.

"Nothing much. He's gone away."

"And the slipper?"

"It must be in his room. I'm going after it." There was no longer any buyer for the prize, and Nick had no idea what he'd do with it, but he hated unfinished assignments. He had to know what was hidden in the tobacco in that toe.

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Finding Cottonwood's room number and opening the door took only a few minutes. Locating the slipper in its hiding place proved to be a bit more difficult. Going through the books and belongings in his suitcase, Nick wondered if he had been a bad man at all—or only a good man with an obsession.

The Persian slipper yielded itself at last, stuffed down inside a bulky climbing boot. Working to empty out the tobacco, Nick could already feel something small and hard in the toe.

Something metallic, with a tiny tag attached.

It was what Bonoto and Cottonwood had died for.

It was the key to a dispatch-box, in the bank of Cox & Company at Charing Cross.

## DETECTIVERSE

*GRAND LARCENY*

*by MARK GRENIER*

You'd think Nick's fee of twenty grand
Would make his clients reel,
But those who pay it understand
They're getting quite a steal.

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**a *NEW* short story by**

**WILLIAM BRITTAIN**

*Mr. Fat, Mr. Tall, and Mr. Short, three mystery men, ordered the construction of a wall in the middle of the desert. The wall was ten feet long, eight feet high, and two cinder blocks thick. Of what earthly use was such a wall in such a place? Keach, who built the wall, just couldn't figure it out. And neither could we. . .*

# THE SECOND REASON

**by WILLIAM BRITTAIN**

Keach flicked a blob of wet cement onto the base of the cinder block, slathered it with his trowel, then hoisted the block laboriously into place. As he snugged the block home with taps from the handle of his trowel, a bead of sweat dribbled from his chin to the ground. It disappeared almost at once, half evaporating into the dry desert air and half soaking into the baked, hard-packed earth.

Damn it all, it was hot! But then, he hadn't expected a picnic. Not at $200 for a single day's work at a time when nearly everybody in the building trades was screaming for something—anything—in the way of jobs.

Keach wiped sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand and looked about at the landscape. Flat, except for the hills away off to the north. A *playa,* the bed of a lake long since dried up in the blasting heat of the desert sun. Little cracks in the flatness where the parched earth, bullet-hard, had shrunk in on itself. Hell must be something like this, Keach figured—hell or the far side of the moon.

Oh, there were some things to break the monotony of the land. His flatbed truck with the piles of cinder blocks and the drums of water. The three men taking their ease in folding chairs under the shade of a canvas fly, with their fancy new car parked nearby.

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And off to his left there was even a mound of rock that looked for all the world like a deck of cards with one card in the middle sticking out a little way. I bet it's an ace, thought Keach, and the dealer's about to hand it to himself.

He shook his head angrily, calling himself all kinds of a fool for seeing a card game in a hunk of rock. But the emptiness was getting to him. The truck and the car. The men sitting there with their iced drinks. Himself. That was all there was.

Except for the wall.

Ten feet long and eight feet high, except for the one corner he hadn't finished yet. It ran almost due north and south with its flat eastern face on a line between holes, each about three inches in diameter, that had been drilled into the earth twelve feet apart. The holes were at least a foot deep—Keach had stuck the handle of his trowel into one without reaching bottom.

Oh, the wall was a good one, all right. One of the best walls Keach had ever built. Two cinder blocks' thick, and dead plumb from top to bottom. Why, that wall would stop a charging rhinoceros dead in its tracks, or even a bull elephant. There wasn't anything that could bring down the wall. Except—

Except what was it for?

Walls were supposed to keep things out, or in. Or sometimes they were made to enclose an area, but that required corners or curves. They could even provide beauty, as in a garden or around a public building.

But this wall just didn't qualify for anything Keach could think of. There it stood in the middle of the dry lake like some monument erected by a prehistoric tribe. A man could walk clear around it in a few seconds, and the dreary view on one side was exactly like that on the other. Keach remembered a movie he'd seen in which beings from outer space had erected a monolith in the middle of a tribe of apes. The thing had resembled an enormous slab of black marble, its shape not unlike his own wall.

Could the thing he was building be some kind of landmark or signal for creatures from another planet? The dry lake would be an ideal place for a flying saucer to land—remote, perfectly flat. Besides, when the three men had come to ask about his services and give their specifications, they'd been especially interested in how much he watched TV. When he said he didn't own one and only watched at a friend's house once a month or so, they'd obviously been happy, and the deal was closed on the spot.

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Things from outer space. In his mind's eye Keach imagined monstrous beings with leathery green skin and reptilian eyes plodding across the lake bed toward the distant hills. He turned around suddenly, half expecting the shapes of the men behind him to waver and begin to change.

But they hadn't changed. The fat one sat with his belly almost out to his knees, drinking deeply from a glass beaded with moisture. The tall thin one was next to him, leaning forward and conversing in a low hum of words. And the shortest one was lounging in a folding deck chair, probably asleep, with his hat over his eyes.

Mr. Fat, Mr. Tall, and Mr. Short. The names were as good as any since Keach didn't know their real ones. They'd just walked in off the street, asked a few questions, and bang!—Keach had a $200 deal just for a long night's drive, followed by a single day's work building the wall. What did he care whether they came from California as their license plate indicated, or from the moon? And it wasn't as if he was doing something wrong. There was no law against building a wall in the desert, was there?

But what's it for, Keach? his brain demanded.

Annoyed with himself, he stomped off toward his truck. First he took a canteen from the shade behind one wheel and drank deeply. He'd had more than a gallon, and here it was just shy of noon. That desert sun did suck the moisture out of a man. Then from under the flat bed he drew out a metal trough, dented and layered with scales of hardened cement.

"Got to mix up a new batch," he said to Mr. Fat, who waved in reply. He dug cement from an open bag with a shovel and followed that with sand from a pile on a tarp near the cab. As he scooped out his first bucket of water from the one drum which hadn't been emptied, he realized that the low hum of speech from the shade under the canvas fly was coming to him clearly through the dry desert air.

"Are you sure this is going to work?" Mr. Tall was asking Mr. Fat. "Isn't he going to notice—"

"Notice what?" Fat answered. "You don't think our big hero will all of a sudden get ambitious and come out here ahead of time, do you? Hell, he always leaves the scut work to us. And when he finally is ready, the light won't exactly be in his favor. Say, you aren't having any second thoughts about this, are you?"

"No, of course not," Mr. Tall pouted. "First thing we get to do something where there's a decent amount of money involved, he

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decides to get rid of us and bring in his own crew. It isn't fair."

"Right. And his yapping about how he's going to tell the chief just because we called him a damn no-good— It's not going to be easy for us to get work after that."

Keach caught himself holding the mixing hoe motionless and staring at the men. With a start he began stirring the slithery liquid concrete which was gray ooze around the blade of the hoe as it sloshed in the trough.

Mr. Short had joined the other two men by this time. Mr. Fat held him by the shoulder with one hand, while with the other he pointed to a spot some 20 yards from the wall.

"I'll be right there, grinding away," he said. "You two will be up in the chopper, same as always. Everything nice and natural."

"Bu-bu-bu-but won't they know it wa-wa-was us?" stuttered Mr. Short.

"How're they going to know?" asked Mr. Fat. "So long as we keep our stories straight, that is. We just say we figured it was something special that some other crew rigged up without telling us. How were we to know it wasn't a phony?"

"Y-yeah, I suppose," said Mr. Short dubiously.

"C'mon, it can't miss." Mr. Fat gestured toward the wall. "There it is. It's real, and everything's going to happen just the way we planned. And nobody's going to catch on ahead of time because we're the only three who are dumb enough to come out here."

"And him?" Mr. Short nodded in Keach's direction.

"He's not only dumber than us," said Mr. Fat. "He's yellow too. I'll put the fear in his bones, don't you worry."

Mr. Tall gave a harsh dry laugh. "Big hero came through the first reason and picked up more loot than we see in a year. So now that he's making it big, he tries to drop us after all the things we showed him about the business. But I think he's going to have some rough sledding with the second reason."

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Fat, raising his glass, "I give you—the second reason."

"Y-yea, man!" giggled Mr. Short. "The se-se-second reason. Ba-*LOOM!*"

The little area where the men sat was swept by a wave of laughter. And then the laughing was cut short as Mr. Fat raised his hand. His gaze locked ominously with that of Keach.

"Just finish the wall, Mr. Keach," said Mr. Fat in a low growl.

Less than an hour later the wall was complete. As Mr. Fat

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doled out the $200 in tens and twenties into Keach's gritty palm, he spoke in a patronizing manner, as if addressing a small child.

"Your work, Mr. Keach, is A-one. And now that you're finished you should keep in mind that we know a lot about you—where you live and work and all—while you don't know anything about us. So maybe you'd just better forget about what you did here today and look on the two hundred as found money."

"Forget? But—"

"Forget, Mr. Keach." The voice was cold, without emotion. "Too good a memory can be a dangerous thing." Mr. Fat's eyes were as grim and menacing as the dry flatness of the desert.

With the money wadded into a ball in his pocket, Keach climbed into the cab of the truck, slammed it into gear, and roared off across the lake bed. The air streaming through the truck's open windows was hot and acrid, but he felt goosebumps rise on his shoulders, and a cold shiver ran up his spine.

Late that night back in town, with the truck put away and his body cleansed by a hot shower, Keach decided to use a part of his $200 to get drunk. He'd earned every nickel of the money, and now he needed the soothing effect of whiskey.

The bar was dark, quiet, with only a few midweek customers. On a stool at one end of the mahogany strip, Keach downed a pair of shots—one, two, just like that. He knew this was going to be a bad drunk. During the good drunks—when a big construction project was in the offing or a new labor contract had been negotiated—he sipped his whiskey slow and easy. But when times were bad, when he was angry or scared or worried, he gulped.

He looked at his image in the mirror and seemed to see Mr. Fat's eyes boring into his.

Why in hell would anyone build a wall out in the middle of the desert?

The aproned bartender switched on the TV at the other end of the narrow room.

"... and now for some scenes from next week's adventure of Barney Kalso, Private Eye."

*Two men, pummeling each other. Then a close-up of a hand holding a pistol. The pistol roared twice, and there was a high-pitched scream from off camera. Finally a car plunging in flames from a bridge.*

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"Too damn much violence," said a boozy voice from a booth. "See if you can find the boxing, huh, Vic?"

"Leave it there," said a powerfully built kid wearing a leather jacket and motorcycle boots. "I wanna see the movie coming up. It's got Cesar Romero and Betty Grable."

The bartender shrugged and moved away from the set as the show's final credits rolled. Prefacing the station break, a filmed commercial began on the screen.

"The Cheetah!" The announcer might have been broadcasting the end of the world, his voice was so deep and serious and compelling. "America's newest small car."

*No music. Complete silence as the camera made a half circle about some dimly lit place. Then the camera lifted and there was a bright yellow semicircle on the screen. A blare of trumpets on the sound track.*

"Sunrise," the announcer went on. "Time to get up and go—with Cheetah!"

*A small dark spot appeared directly in front of the rising sun. Gradually it grew bigger and became an automobile.*

"The Cheetah. America's move to economy. Tested at thirty-two miles per gallon on the open road. . ."

*The car was nearer now, cruising along a shaft of sunlight, a tiny green insect getting larger every second.*

". . . and twenty-four miles per gallon in city driving."

*The cameraman had switched to a wide-angle lens, and the objects in the foreground of the picture jumped into sharp focus at the same time.*

Keach shook his head. It was amazing what those TV cameramen could do.

And then he froze.

The drink in his hand sloshed onto the bar. No. Yes, there it was. Off to the side of the screen.

That rock—the one that looked like a deck of cards. He'd spent the whole day right at the spot where the film of the car had been taken.

*An overhead view of the Cheetah, now traveling along the ray of light across the cracked surface of the lake bed.*

"Fuel economy. Your first reason to buy the exciting new Cheetah!"

*A huge sheet of paper stretched between upright posts occupied the whole TV screen. Splashed across the paper in large red letters:*

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*Reason #1*
*Fuel Economy*
*Buy CHEETAH*

*And then the car, doing at least 70, tore through the sign with a growl of power, tearing the paper to shreds. The driver skidded to a halt a hundred yards beyond.*

Keach's mind screamed with things remembered.

The deck-of-cards rock.

The three-inch-wide holes.

The wall, with its solid cinder-block surface facing due east—toward the rising sun.

The announcer continued: "You've seen our film of Reason Number One for buying the new Cheetah. Next week on this same channel we will show you Reason Number Two. Be sure to watch."

Keach visualized the driver—whose name he didn't even know—smashing unsuspectingly into the paper sign, expecting thin air behind it.

But he, Keach, had built a wall—a solid wall in the middle of the desert.

And if he said anything? If he could warn the unknown driver before the second reason was filmed? What would Mr. Fat do then?

As Keach leaned across the bar, he could feel the raw whiskey churning in his stomach and burning his throat. His groan of outrage, shame, fear, became a high keening in the small barroom.

And from the TV came the announcer's voice in a final message:

"Buy Cheetah. It's a hit!"

"Q"

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**a *NEW* detective story by**

**STEPHEN WASYLYK**

*We welcome Stephen Wasylyk's first appearance in EQMM and hope to publish more of his slyly humorous detective stories. In this one you will meet two senior citizens, the septuagenarian sleuths Mr. Morley and Mr. Bakov, residents of the Golden Age Retirement Center, Inc. Thin Morley and fat Bakov are not the usual detective team. For their age they are spry and alert and inquisitive, brimming with shrewd insights, with the accumulated innocence, wisdom, and incredulity of their seventy-plus years. . .*

# THE RESCUE OF OMAR GANSKI

**by *STEPHEN WASYLYK***

Many elderly people rise early, the habit of a lifetime difficult to break. At the Golden Age Retirement Center, Inc., Morley and Bakov always led the way into the dining room for breakfast, whipcord-thin Morley to spoon down his sugar-laden, cream-enriched oatmeal absently, his mind absorbed by the morning paper, and the overweight Bakov to concentrate on his skim-milk enhanced mini-portion with sad resignation, remembering breakfasts long past that had been far more elaborate and appetizing.

On this particular morning Morley unfolded his paper with his usual anticipation, adjusted the spectacles perched on the end of his prominent seventy-five-year-old nose and reached for his spoon without glancing from the headlines. His hand stopped in mid-air and remained there while he slowly read the story that had caught his eye.

Finished, he slapped the table.

"The police are idiots, Bakov!" he snapped. "Do you know what they have done? They have arrested Omar Ganski."

"That is regrettable," said Bakov. "Who is Omar Ganski and why did they arrest him?"

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Morley waved his arms, his loosely fitting, bright Hawaiian shirt making him look like an emaciated scarecrow buffeted by a high wind, the youthful blue eyes in his seamed face bright with indignation, the frizzled gray hair standing out from his head as if charged with electricity.

"He is an old friend and they say he killed a young girl. That is nonsense. Why should a seventy-two-year-old man kill a young girl?"

"They must have some evidence," said Bakov reasonably. He clutched his oatmeal bowl with one hand, the other busy with the spoon. There would be tea at mid-morning but that was a long time off and Bakov was hungry. He was always hungry because of the diet imposed on him by the doctor in an effort to keep Bakov's weight at a reasonable 200 pounds.

Morley snorted. "Evidence. They found him bending over the body with a knife in his hand. What kind of evidence is that?"

"That is good evidence," said Bakov.

Morley pushed his oatmeal from him, emptied his coffee cup, folded his paper, and said, "Let us go, Bakov."

"Go where?"

"To rescue Omar."

Bakov's fingers combed pink scalp where once there had been thick black wavy hair. "You are John Wayne? You are going to ride up to the jail on your horse and pull down the walls?"

"No, Bakov. We are going to solve the crime. If Omar is innocent, then someone is guilty. We will find the guilty one and turn him over to the police. Then they will let Omar free."

"I do not like that idea. We are not detectives."

"Did we not solve the case of the murdered nurse?"

"The man almost killed us. It was lucky the police arrived."

"I planned it that way," said Morley grandly. "Come, Bakov. Finish your oatmeal and tea and we will go."

"It is raining."

"All the more reason. What else is there to do today? The bikini woman cannot sun herself on the balcony of the apartment house across the street for us to watch. The bright young girls passing will be bundled in raincoats. Morgenstein says he will not play chess with you again because you insist on jumping his queen with your pawns. There is only the television with its soap operas and game shows that all the old people watch. It is better to go help Omar. Get your umbrella quickly, Bakov. I will sign the reg-

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ister so that the director will know we are gone."

Fifteen minutes later they were standing in a slanting rain at the bus stop outside the gates of the center, Morley in a too-large trenchcoat, Bakov holding high a shapeless umbrella with several broken ribs.

Bakov cleared his throat. "I do not like to mention this, Morley, but who will pay the bus fare?"

"At this hour it is only ten cents for senior citizens," said Morley.

"That is ten cents more than I have. Better we should wait until later when we can ride for free."

"We cannot wait, Bakov. Omar needs our help now. But do not worry, we will ride for free. When we get on the bus, do not sit down. Stand behind the driver and look poor. I will do the rest."

The bus pulled up, splashing water on the sidewalk and over Morley's shoes. Bakov folded his umbrella and climbed aboard. Morley followed.

"You splashed me," said Morley sternly to the driver. "Have you no consideration for your passengers?"

"Just put twenty cents in the box, Pop," said the driver wearily as he pulled away from the curb.

"Senior citizens ride for free," said Morley.

"Not before nine," said the driver.

Morley looked around. "I see no sign. You must be mistaken."

"Pop, put in twenty cents or get off."

"We refuse to get off. You do not know your own rules."

The driver pulled in to the curb. "Off," he said.

A middle-aged man sitting in the front said, "Let them ride. The bus company doesn't need their twenty cents."

A half-dozen passengers loudly voiced agreement.

"I'm just following orders," said the driver. "If you want to be a wise guy, you put in the twenty cents."

"I'll do just that," said the man. He dropped the coins into the fare box and smiled at Morley. "He's right, you know. Before nine you must pay."

"Thank you, sir," said Morley. "I will remember."

He pushed Bakov toward the rear of the bus.

"You knew that would happen," said Bakov.

"Of course," said Morley. "It is only to make people happy. The twenty cents means nothing to the gray-haired man and he will feel good all day because he helped us."

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When the bus worked its way deep into center city, Morley leaned down and looked out the window. "It is time to get off, Bakov."

Just before they descended at the next stop, Morley tapped the bus driver on the shoulder. "Learn to be pleasant," he said. "Someday you too will be old."

The driver glared at him. "With passengers like you I'll never make it."

They walked a few blocks to police headquarters, a round plain building of uncertain architecture as if the designer had been informed he had no more money to spend before he was finished.

Inside the door Morley asked a few questions and they went up to the second floor and down a long hall to a door marked *Detective Bureau*. Inside they were directed past a line of desks to another door. Morley pushed it open.

The man behind the desk was short and squat with long dark straight hair combed down over his forehead.

"You are Lieutenant Hook?" asked Morley.

The man put down his pencil. "Right."

"We are Morley and Bakov, friends of Omar Ganski. We have come to tell you that you have arrested the wrong man."

Hook leaned forward. "You know something we don't?"

"Not yet," said Morley. "All we know is that Omar could not kill a young girl. If you would explain the circumstances, Bakov and I will go and find the right man."

Hook stared at him. "*You* will find the right man?"

"Of course. It should not be difficult."

Hook's face began to get red. His voice sounded strained. "You will do me a big favor if you will go away. Now."

"All right," said Morley. "We will go. We will go to the newspaper and tell them that the police state is now here. We will ask why a seventy-two-year-old man is in jail while thieves and hoodlums walk the streets and mug law-abiding citizens. I think it will make a very good story for the first page of the morning paper."

Hook sighed. "If it will shut you up and get you back to wherever you came from, I'll tell you. One of the neighbors heard loud voices and a scream. He called the police. He opened the door of his room and saw Omar Ganski bending over the body of the girl on the stairs. When the officers arrived, Ganski was still holding the knife and the girl was dead."

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"What reason could he have?" asked Morley.

"The old man and the girl were always arguing because she played rock music on her stereo too loud to suit him."

Morley rolled his eyes. "What could be worse than loud rock music? But Omar would not kill her for that. He would smash up her stereo with a hammer maybe, but he would not stab her."

"The knife was from his own kitchen."

"Perhaps it was stolen."

"By who?"

"By who, by who," said Morley impatiently. "How do I know by who until I investigate? You said they were on the stairs. Where on the stairs?"

"On the landing between the second and third floors."

"And what does Omar say about this?"

"He claims he had been to the market to buy a few things and found the girl's body when he came up the stairs. He saw the knife and picked it up and that was when the neighbor saw him."

Morley nudged Bakov. "You see? I told you they were idiots."

Hook's face began to glow again. "I suppose you have it all figured out."

"Not yet," said Morley, "but it's easy to see you know nothing of senior citizens and even less of Omar Ganski. I will explain. The years do not treat all people alike. We have men of seventy at the center who can run for a mile, but we have others much younger who cannot climb steps without stopping for rest. Omar is the resting kind. He does not run up those stairs. He does not even climb them all at once. He goes from floor to floor and he rests in between. To think he would have the strength to harm a healthy young girl after climbing those stairs is foolishness. He could not wrestle with a kitten. Therefore Omar is innocent."

Hook's eyes narrowed. "Look, Barnaby Jones," he said. "Did it ever occur to you he didn't go *up* the stairs, that he came out of his room with the knife and followed her *down*?"

"Of course not," said Morley. "If Omar said he was going up, then he was going up."

"With the groceries?"

"With the groceries," said Morley firmly.

"There were no groceries," said Hook.

Morley looked at Bakov. Bakov shrugged.

"The answer is simple," said Morley. "Someone stole the groceries."

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Hook's voice rose. "Someone stole his knife and now someone stole his groceries?"

"Obviously," said Morley.

"I tried to be nice," said Hook slowly. "You have to admit I tried to be nice. But there are things here that you cannot understand and I can only advise you to take your fat friend and get out."

"We will go," said Morley. "We will call you to come and get the murderer when we capture him."

Hook's face was glowing. "If you go near that house, I will arrest you personally." He pointed at the door. "Now go home."

As they descended the stairs, Bakov said, "I think that Lieutenant Hook was angry."

"Lieutenant Hook is an idiot," said Morley. "Only an idiot would have arrested Omar in the first place. A good detective would know there are two crimes here. Not only is the girl dead, but someone stole Omar's groceries. That is an important crime, but Hook does not even think about that. He does not realize that this is the second day of the month and Omar probably took his social-security check and spent it on the groceries. Now, when we get Omar released, what will he have to eat? I tell you, Bakov, Hook is no detective because he does not know what is going on in the world."

"Where do we go now?"

"To Omar's building. Where else? Do I care what Hook says?"

They took another bus, this time riding free because it was after nine. When they stepped to the sidewalk, the rain had ended. They were walking past a small supermarket when Morley stopped.

"We will go in, Bakov," he said. "If Omar bought his groceries here, the manager may remember."

They found the manager in a cubbyhole in a corner of the store. He was a small worried-looking man with thinning hair.

"Tell me," said Morley. "Do you cash social-security checks?"

"Sure," said the manager. "If you have identification."

"It is not for me," said Morley. "It is for a man named Omar Ganski. He would have been here last night. Perhaps you remember."

The manager shook his head.

Bakov pointed at a small canvas bag. "When I ran a dress shop in Secaucus, I did not put the receipts from the night before in the

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bank until the next morning. Perhaps you do the same and the check from last night is still there."

"Why is it so important?" asked the manager.

"Omar is in trouble," said Morley. "Murder trouble. If the check is there, it proves he is innocent."

"I'll look." The manager leafed through a bundle of government checks, stopped at one, and smiled. "Here it is."

"It is as I thought," said Morley triumphantly.

"Tell me," said Bakov. "If Omar gets his check in the morning mail, why does he wait until evening to do his shopping?"

The manager smiled. "Everybody in this neighborhood likes to shop during the day because they don't want to go out at night. So we always offer evening specials. They can save a lot by coming here in the evening. Many of our customers on fixed incomes are willing to take a little risk because it means their food budget stretches further."

Morley nodded. "A little risk would not stop that bull-headed Omar." He patted the manager's shoulder. "Thank you for your help."

As they made their way out of the store, Bakov's gaze fixed longingly on the display in the baked-goods section, his head swiveling as he walked until it could turn no more; then he had to twist his body so that he was skipping sideways.

Morley eyed him curiously. "You are dancing the Boogaloo, Bakov?"

"I am looking," said Bakov defensively. "I cannot eat but I am allowed to look."

"Your stomach will get you in trouble, Bakov."

"If you could hear it complain, you would know I am already in trouble."

At the next street they turned the corner.

"There," said Morley. "That is Omar's house, the one with the man sitting on the steps."

The building was one of a red-brick row, three stories high, once the in-town home of someone wealthy, but long since remodeled into a roominghouse that had deteriorated with the rest of the neighborhood. One of its neighboring buildings was equally seedy, the other boarded up.

They crossed the narrow street between the cars parked at the curb. The man sitting on the steps was of an indeterminate age, a shapeless hat jammed on his grizzled head, the dark stubble of a

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beard shadowing his face, an old coat buttoned over a scrawny, undershirted, shirtless chest. He held a bottle concealed in a brown paper bag, raising it now and then to drink deeply.

"Good morning," said Morley.

The man looked at him silently.

"Do you live here?"

The man lifted the bottle and drank.

"What is your name?" asked Morley.

The man stared into space. His brow furrowed, then seemed to give up.

"Do you know Omar Ganski?" asked Morley.

The man put down the bottle and stared at him. "You got a quarter?"

"No," said Morley. "We have no money."

The man raised the bottle again as if dismissing them.

Morley and Bakov went into the house.

"That is too bad," said Bakov. "I do not like to see a man like that."

"Do not feel sorry for the Man-with-No-Name, Bakov. There is something about him I do not understand."

"What is there to understand? He drinks too much wine."

"Perhaps," said Morley. "But he is too clean. I have never seen a man who drinks too much wine so clean. It is as if someone had just given him a bath."

"So he is not allowed? There are places such men can go where they are taken care of."

"They do not give them baths," said Morley.

They paused on the first floor. The hallway was dim. There was a room at the back, one on each side of the narrow hall, and another room at the front of the building.

Morley waved. "There is nothing here for us, Bakov. Let us go upstairs."

The second floor seemed even dingier. Morley selected the front room and tapped at the door. It opened, restrained by a chain, only far enough to show the wrinkled, apprehensive face of an old woman.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"We are friends of Omar Ganski," said Morley. "We are investigating the murder of the young girl."

"You are not the police?"

"Not exactly," said Morley.

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The voice held a touch of panic. "You could be thieves."

"We are interested only in helping our friend," said Morley gently. "Did you hear the noise last night?"

"There was some noise," she said cautiously.

"Did you open your door to see? From here you can see the stairs."

Her eyes became frightened. "I was afraid to open my door."

"Not even a little? Not even on the chain?"

Panic crossed her face. "You are not police," she said. "Go away!" She slammed the door.

Morley sighed. "It is difficult to be a detective if people will not talk to you. Let us go upstairs, Bakov."

The stairs to the third floor consisted of two flights doubling back on each other at a landing halfway up.

"Ah," said Morley. "This landing must be where they found the body of the poor girl and Omar with the knife. What do you think, Bakov?"

"I do not think," said Bakov. "My legs are not for these stairs and I cannot breathe too good. Why does Omar live in such a place?"

"It is how the Omars of the city survive, Bakov. He does not receive much money. He would like to live in a retirement center but he cannot afford it."

"Neither can we. One of these days they will raise the rates again and we will be unable to pay and the director will tell us to leave."

"Think positive, Bakov. Perhaps we will be dead by that time."

They went up to the third floor.

"Omar's room is at the back," said Morley. "Let us try this one in front."

He knocked.

The door was opened by a heavy-set, well muscled man with a full oval face and heavily lidded eyes.

"What do you want?" he asked gruffly.

Morley explained. "We want only to ask a few questions. One of the neighbors called the police. Was that you?"

"No," said the man. "If I called the police every time there was an argument, they'd be here six times a day. I go to work, I come home, I mind my own business. I don't care if they all kill each other."

"But Omar did not kill the girl."

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"What difference does it make? They can't do anything to the old man except keep him in jail. He's better off there. He'll get three meals a day and a roof over his head and he won't have to worry about his social-security check stretching from one month to the next."

"But it is wrong because he is innocent."

"Well, if he is, let the police round up all the girl's boy friends. She had a parade of them. Maybe one of them knocked her off. Now leave me alone."

He slammed the door.

Morley sighed. "This is indeed a difficult problem, Bakov."

"I told you it would not be easy. The police are not fools. They would not arrest Omar unless they had good reason."

"I am not ready to give up yet. Let us see who else lives here."

They went down the hall. A small card alongside one door said *Lisa* in big bold letters.

"This must be the girl's room," said Morley. "Let us try the other."

He knocked at the door across the hall.

The man who opened it was young, perhaps in his middle twenties, his blond hair long, a full beard masking his face; he was dressed in tight jeans and a loose short-sleeved shirt.

Morley told him what they wanted.

"Come in," said the young man.

The room was surprisingly well furnished, dominated by a huge shelf of record albums and an expensive stereo along one wall.

"My name is Penrose Hackett," said the young man. "It was I who called the police."

"Ah," said Morley. "Did you go look?"

"Only after I called. I saw Mr. Ganski with the knife. He was bending over the girl. I'm really sorry about that. I like Mr. Ganski but I had to tell the truth. He and I used to visit each other. We like the same kind of music."

"I did not know Omar liked music," said Morley. "What kind?"

Hackett indicated the albums. "Classical. It is my life. Someday I'll be a flautist. I practise every day. They'll recognize my talent."

"A what?" asked Bakov.

"A flautist. I play the flute."

"That is nice," said Bakov.

"The policeman Hook told us that Omar used to fight with the

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young woman because she played rock music too loud," said Morley. "I suppose it bothered you also?"

"Extremely," said Hackett. "She had no consideration for others. When she was home, I couldn't listen to my own music or even practise."

"Ah," said Morley. "Did you speak to her about it?"

Hackett looked uncomfortable. "It wasn't that easy. I'm a shy person."

"She was not shy."

"No. She had a lot of men coming to her room."

Morley's eyebrows rose. "It was possible she was a—"

"I suspect she was," said Hackett.

Morley cleared his throat, embarrassed. "Did you ever visit her?"

Hackett smiled wryly. "I wasn't good enough for her. She used to make fun of me."

"That made you angry?"

"Does any man like being made a fool?"

"If Omar is innocent," said Morley slowly, "then someone else is guilty. That someone could be you. You had more reason than Omar."

"That's nonsense," said Hackett. "I told you I called the police and I saw him with the knife leaning over the body."

"That may be so, but we have already proved Omar was on his way home with a bag of groceries. He was coming up the stairs. He must have just found the body when you saw him." Morley shook his head. "Are you sure you are not the murderer?"

"How can I be?" asked Hackett. "I told you I'm a flautist. I'm not a violent person."

"That is true," said Bakov. "Musicians are not violent. Passionate, yes. I once knew a lady cello player—"

"Then who?" asked Morley. "If someone had come down the stairs, Omar would have seen him and told the police, but Hook did not say that Omar saw someone. Therefore the murderer has to be from this floor."

"There is only the man in the front room," said Bakov.

"You are right, Bakov," said Morley. He turned to Hackett. "What do you know of him?"

"Not much. His name is Wilson. He moved in about three months ago and he's not very friendly."

"Was he friendly with the girl?"

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Hackett hesitated. "I did see him once coming from her room but I also saw him coming from Mr. Ganski's room yesterday, yet he wasn't friendly with Mr. Ganski. He seldom speaks to anyone. I've never understood why he lives here. He seems to have a good job and could probably afford something better." He waved a hand. "No one lives here unless he has to."

"That is a good point," said Morley. "Why should he live here?" He paced the room. His face brightened. "I have puzzled it out. There can be only one answer. The man is hiding from the police elsewhere," he said triumphantly. "He is a dangerous criminal."

"You have solved it, Morley," said Bakov. "Let us call Lieutenant Hook and go home."

"And he will laugh at us. We must find proof."

"But why should he kill the girl?" asked Bakov.

"That is obvious, Bakov. She found out his secret and it was necessary to silence the poor young woman."

Morley paced, his hands clasped behind his back. "We must have a plan," he said.

"I am leaving," said Bakov. "I have experience with your plans. I am also very hungry and it is time for tea at the center."

Morley waved. "You are always hungry, Bakov, but our obligation to Omar comes before your stomach." He stopped suddenly. "It is simple. The musician will go to Wilson's room and tell him that he saw him kill the girl. He will demand money to keep silent. Wilson will pay. We will be witnesses. Then we will call Lieutenant Hook."

"You are crazy!" said Bakov. "If it is as you say and he killed the girl to keep her silent, what do think he will do to the musician?"

"The musician has nothing to fear. We will protect him."

"With what? We are not experts at hari-kari."

Hackett's brow furrowed, then cleared. "You mean karate."

"Whatever," said Bakov. "It is best to call the police."

Morley looked at Hackett. "Do you agree?"

Hackett scratched his beard. "Well, I would not like to be killed."

"Then we will all go together," said Morley. "He will not dare attack all three of us. When he sees that we have discovered his secret, he will confess."

Hackett sighed. "I suppose you won't give up until you prove Mr. Ganski's innocent."

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"Not until we make the man confess."

"Then I can't let you go alone. I think I have the answer." Hackett lifted the pillow on his bed and picked up a heavy revolver. "I have this for protection. I really don't know how to use it but he won't know that. If I point it at him, he'll behave himself."

"That is good," said Bakov.

With Bakov mumbling in the rear, they went down the hall to the front room. Morley knocked.

Wilson opened the door.

"I would advise you to confess to the murder of the poor young girl," said Morley dramatically.

Wilson stared at him. "You must be crazy."

"We have puzzled it out. All agree that you, and only you, could have done it."

Wilson laughed. "Two senile old goats and a shifty musician? Get lost before I throw all three of you down the stairs."

"Do not get violent," said Morley. "We have a gun." He motioned to Hackett. "Show him our gun."

Hackett pointed the gun at the man.

"You see?" asked Morley. "It is best that you confess."

Wilson licked his lips. "I didn't do anything," he said. "What makes you think I did?"

"You are in hiding," said Morley. "Perhaps for a horrible crime you committed elsewhere. The girl found out your secret, so you killed her. Is that not so?"

"No," said Wilson. "I'm not in hiding. I was divorced a few months ago and my wife's lawyer talked the judge into giving her large support payments. Even though I have a good job, most of the money goes to her. This dump is all I can afford."

"The musician says you went to Omar's room yesterday. You stole the knife then."

Wilson shook his head. "I've never been in the old man's room."

"You went to the girl's room—"

"Never. The last thing I need is to get involved with another woman."

"But the musician said—"

Wilson's look was level. "He lied."

"Why should he lie?"

"I think the answer to that is obvious," said Wilson.

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They all stared at Hackett.

Hackett smiled and somehow he was no longer a shy hesitant young man and the gun was steady, too steady for someone who said he didn't know how to use one.

"You two busybodies couldn't let well enough alone," he said. "Push, push, push. Questions, questions, questions. You'd just keep digging until something turned up. I have to stop you and it's better now than later. The question is, what do I do with you?"

"You cannot kill all three of us," said Morley. "It would be best to put down the gun and surrender."

Hackett smiled again. "You're wrong, old man. I *can* kill you all. Believe me, it's very easy. I suppose the best way is to shoot you two old geezers first, then make it look like Wilson committed suicide after shooting you because you discovered he killed the girl. I'll tell the police I heard the shots and ran in to find all three of you dead."

"They will know it is your gun," said Morley.

"In my business I don't use guns that can be traced," said Hackett.

Bakov suddenly swung his umbrella upward, hitting Hackett's arm. The gun went off, the bullet splintering the window.

Wilson leaped at Hackett, his fist smashing into Hackett's face. Hackett fell backward, Wilson on top of him, and the gun went off again. Wilson gave a little moan and rolled to one side, clutching his left arm.

Catlike, Hackett rose to a crouch, the gun leveling at the helpless man.

Holding his umbrella by the ferrule, Bakov swung it high and smashed it down on Hackett's head, the heavy crook of the handle splitting with a dull sound. Hackett pitched forward and lay still.

Heavy footsteps pounded on the stairs and the Man-with-No-Name, no longer vague and disoriented but vigorous and alert, charged into the room, a gun in one hand and a badge in the other. He stopped.

"What the hell is going on here?" he asked.

Bakov sighed. "I have broken my umbrella," he said sadly.

The sun was its usual brightness the next day, the breeze balmy. Morley and Bakov were in their deck chairs on the brick patio of the retirement center, their field glasses lowered to their

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chests because the woman in the bikini, who sunned herself each day on a balcony of the apartment house across the way, had gone indoors.

Morley sighed. "Omar will be back in his room today."

"That is good," said Bakov. "Although he was not too happy with us when he found out what we had done."

Morley's voice was indignant. "How were we to know that Lieutenant Hook did not really put him in jail? How were we to know he had put him in a nice hotel room with room service so that Omar could order everything he wanted for free? How were we to know Lieutenant Hook put that story in the paper only so that the musician would think the police believed his lies?

"Did someone tell us that Hook suspected the musician was a hit man that all the police had been looking for, and that he killed the girl because she suspected something? No! They did not even tell us that the Man-with-No-Name was really a detective in disguise who was watching the musician." He waved his hands. "I do not understand why Hook was so upset. After all, is not the musician in jail now?"

"He said the hit man would have led him to the other criminals who hired him, but we spoiled all that." Bakov chuckled. "I have never seen a man so angry."

Morley smiled. "He must learn to control his temper if he wishes to become a captain. However, it is good that the man Wilson will be all right. He was shot only a little in the arm."

"His wife seems like a nice woman," said Bakov. "In the hospital she was very upset even though they are divorced. Perhaps they will get together again. It is sometimes necessary only to keep the lawyers out of it."

"It was also nice of the police to take up a collection for Omar's groceries," said Morley. "They would not go to the old woman on the second floor who took the groceries when Omar put them down to look at the body, even though she had committed a crime. It is understandable. Her social-security check had been stolen and she had nothing to eat for two days."

"Do not speak of things to eat," said Bakov. "I am already hungry and it is still an hour before tea is ready."

"You must learn to control your appetite, Bakov. Because of your stomach we almost ended in jail yesterday."

Bakov's voice was astonished. "Because of my stomach?"

"Your stomach," said Morley firmly. "It was bad enough that

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Lieutenant Hook was angry with us for spoiling his plan and that Omar was angry with us because he hoped to stay in that nice hotel room for a long time, eating all the good things that hotels have. It was even bad enough when the Man-with-No-Name became angry with me because I told him he was too clean to be a good wine drinker."

Morley shook his head.

"But tell me, Bakov. When the detectives had their little snack brought in, was it necessary for you to steal Lieutenant Hook's prune Danish while he wasn't looking?"

"Q"

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# A GLASS OF PORT

**by *ANDREW GARVE***

James Farran would probably have been a much more successful estate agent and surveyor if it hadn't been for his wealthy uncle. Farran certainly had all the necessary qualifications for the job. He had passed his examinations and had the right letters after his name. He had good looks, a disarming grin, a public-school accent, and unlimited assurance. He was a persuasive talker, and plausible answers to awkward questions sprang readily to his lips. He had made a careful study of the psychology of buyers and sellers, and was adept at playing on their hopes and fears while remaining detached himself. He knew that most people were mugs, and he knew how to exploit the fact.

All the same, his business in the outer suburbs of North London was only moderately lucrative. He took what came his way, but he made no effort to break fresh ground. He left most of the hard work to his able young assistant, Peter Hassall, who was eager to get married and so didn't spare himself. The trouble with Farran was that he had no great incentive. He knew that sooner or later he would be inheriting a large fortune. Uncle Charles, a widower with no nearer claims on him, had said so.

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Uncle Charles, proudly reminiscing about the wire rope business he'd built up in Stepney, had even named the figure—a quarter of a million pounds. With that sort of money in the offing, Farran saw no reason why he should sweat. It wasn't as though he would have to wait very long. Uncle Charles, though still pretty hale, was past 70. A few more years should see him out. And Farran, at 35, could afford to be patient.

Farran was in no urgent need of money. His domestic expenses were low, now that his wife had gone to live with another man. The house he occupied wasn't a grand one—it was actually a modest detached villa, one of several identical ones in the district—so that the outgoings were well within his means. His car was a charge to the business. And commissions, thanks to Peter, flowed in steadily. He had nothing to worry about.

That, at least, was what he thought—but he was wrong. Suddenly something happened that upset all his calculations. Uncle Charles's austere Scottish housekeeper fell seriously ill and was removed to hospital. A new housekeeper had to be engaged quickly. Farran was weekending with a girl friend and had left no telephone number. By the time he got back, Uncle Charles had interviewed and engaged a cosily attractive widow of 40 named Mrs. Lunn.

At first, Farran felt no more than a slight uneasiness. His relationship with his uncle seemed as close as ever. He still visited the house regularly, still played chess with the old man every Friday evening, still had his confidence. But the uneasiness soon changed to alarm. It became clear that Mrs. Lunn was showing a devotion to Uncle Charles well beyond the call of duty, and that Uncle Charles was finding the new regime very pleasant.

No one could be certain, but it began to seem quite possible that before many months were out Uncle Charles might ask Mrs. Lunn to marry him. It was the sort of thing that happened very often. If he did, and she accepted, it was she who would inherit the bulk of the old boy's fortune, not Farran.

It was at about this time that Farran began to consider the possibility of hastening his uncle's demise.

He approached the idea without any feeling of compunction. He had never had any real fondness for his uncle. He had never had any fondness for anyone except himself—or so his wife had said. He had no moral scruples that counted for anything against the

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possible loss of a quarter of a million pounds. The only question in his mind was whether the job could be done safely.

No easy way suggested itself. Uncle Charles was tough; he wasn't the sort of man to succumb to a cold draft cunningly created behind his chair, or an extra glass of brandy too persistently pressed on him. He would need, at the very least, a bang on the head. And Farran knew that he was the very last person who could safely bang Uncle Charles on the head, for as his uncle's sole heir he had the strongest of motives for murder and would be the obvious suspect.

In fact, he decided, he couldn't even consider the possibility except on one condition—that he was first able to organize for himself an absolutely unbreakable alibi. He must be able to produce at least one reliable witness who would swear that throughout the relevant time Farran had either been in his company, or had been so far away from the scene of the crime that he couldn't possibly have committed it. Yet, somehow, he must be able to commit it.

That was the problem—and short of getting the Magic Circle in on the job, there seemed no solution to it. How was it possible to convince a normally intelligent person, in possession of normal faculties, that he had been in one place when he had actually been in another?

Farran had a fertile and ingenious mind, but for several days he made no progress at all with his problem. Then, one morning when Peter Hassall was out on a survey job and he was holding the fort at the office, an idea came to him by pure chance. A man had called to inquire about a house which was advertised in the window as "a bijou residence with attractive elevation," and Farran, refreshing his memory about the advertisement, discovered that it referred to a house similar to his own.

He launched at once into an enthusiastic personal recommendation, praising both the design and the quality of the workmanship. It was, he agreed, a standard product, but the standard was of the highest. No better houses at the price had been built in the district. The man seemed impressed, and asked if there were any more of the same type on the market. Farran consulted his register and found that there were two more.

As he ran his eye over the cards, he saw that one of the two was on the same road as Uncle Charles's far more splendid house, 20 or 30 yards away on the opposite side of the street. In that moment inspiration came to him.

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How, he had asked himself, could one convince a witness that he was in one place when he was actually in another? Here, rough and unshaped but full of promise, was the answer: *By taking him to a house that looked exactly like another house*!

Farran's house was 15 minutes by car from his uncle's. If, on some plausible pretext, he could take a witness ostensibly to his own home, but in fact to this second house near his uncle's, and if he could then slip across the road and dispose of his uncle in not more than two or three minutes, he would have his ironclad alibi.

It was, Farran realized, a far-fetched idea—but then a quarter of a million pounds was a far-fetched sum of money. That evening he settled down to do some solid thinking about it, and he reached three basic conclusions.

First, if he did attempt any such plan he would have to make certain that his witness had no chance of noting anything about the route taken or the precise location of the building. Darkness alone would not insure that. There would have to be fog.

Next, a part at any rate of the second house would have to be made to look exactly the same, in every detail of decoration and furnishing, as Farran's own house, so that if by any chance the police still had doubts about where Farran had been, the witness's description would clinch the matter.

Thirdly, though Farran would obviously need to get control of the second house, he couldn't safely buy it himself or, openly, have anything to do with it. The plan, in fact, would be feasible only if he could find an accomplice—someone who would be prepared to share the risk for the sake of the loot, someone who could buy the house independently. Finding such a person would be extraordinarily difficult. Probably impossible.

All the same, Farran continued to toy with the idea.

In June that year Farran took a fortnight's holiday trip to the Mediterranean on a cruise liner, and against all expectation he found his accomplice—a woman. She was down in the passenger list as a Mrs. Bramley Hever, and she was traveling alone. She had a slim figure and artfully applied makeup, so that at anything but very close quarters she looked well under 40. Farran doubted if she was actually more than 50.

On the way out to Marseilles she was constantly in the company of an elderly, prosperous-looking Yorkshireman, who paid for all her drinks and bought lunch for her when they went

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ashore at Gibraltar and cheerfully lost small but regular sums to her at shuffleboard and deck quoits, at which she was expert and he was not. In the evenings the pair usually disappeared into her cabin. The relationship was abruptly broken off at Marseilles, where the Yorkshireman was joined by his wife who had traveled overland to avoid the Bay. From Marseilles to Naples, Mrs. Bramley Hever played bridge, always for high stakes. She seemed to be as expert at bridge as at shuffleboard.

Farran linked up with her during a shore excursion to Pompeii. Their first exchanges were wary, but the acquaintance ripened quickly and they were soon confiding in each other. Mrs. Bramley Hever's name was Irene. There had not been, Farran gathered, a Mr. Bramley Hever for many years.

Irene, though she had only a modest private income, apparently spent much time on cruise liners. She found the life, she said, surprisingly economical. Farran, having studied her methods, could well believe it. After a while he told her about Uncle Charles, and the large inheritance that was not in jeopardy. She was both interested and sympathetic. She said, jokingly, that it was a pity something didn't happen to Uncle Charles, and Farran said, jokingly, that the same thought had crossed his mind.

They amused themselves by discussing various things that might happen to Uncle Charles. Farran eventually put forward his second-house idea. They considered it, academically. As they steamed back through the Mediterranean, the discussion grew less academic. They had probed each other's souls and reached an understanding.

When the liner finally docked at Tilbury, Irene went to a hotel in London while Farran made discreet inquiries to see if the second house was still for sale. It was. Irene canceled a passage she'd booked to Madeira and moved to a hotel in North London. It was agreed that henceforth she and Farran should communicate only by letter or telephone. As far as the world would know, they were strangers to each other. Farran felt well satisfied with his accomplice-to-be. She was intelligent and resourceful, and untroubled by scruples. He trusted her for one reason only: her life's freedom would also be at stake.

From now on the conspiracy went forward smoothly. Irene, with funds supplied by Farran through a devious channel, bought the empty house, using another agent. In September she moved in.

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Farran had agreed with her that it would be sufficient if the hall, sitting room, kitchen, and downstairs closet of the two houses were made identical. There were no serious difficulties. Irene had all her downstairs rooms cream-washed, except the kitchen, which was white. Farran spent quiet weekends redecorating his own ground floor in the same colors. Irene modeled her kitchen on Farran's, buying equipment of the same type. Farran had an almost new mushroom-colored carpet on his ground floor, and red linoleum in the kitchen. Irene ordered the same carpet and the same linoleum, matching the colors from leftover fragments that Farran sent her.

Both ordered new contemporary furniture of a standard make for their sitting rooms, using different shops. Both hung identical pictures on the walls. The position of chairs and sofas, TV sets and occasional tables, had to be plotted. Lampshades and curtains had to be matched. Little piles of paperbacked books had to be duplicated, even to the exact titles. Anything that couldn't be duplicated had to be removed upstairs.

Farran actually enjoyed the preparations, the battle of wits with opponents who had still to appear. He prided himself on foreseeing all contingencies. He warned Irene to avoid making friends in the district till the enterprise was over, so that there would be no danger of anyone dropping in or telephoning unexpectedly during the crucial hours. He remembered to tell her to use no perfume in her house. He insisted on exact identity even in the smallest detail. He even oiled the hinges of his closet door, because it squeaked slightly and Irene's didn't.

Finally, on a dark night when the risk was small, each paid a simultaneous visit to the other's house, slipping in through doors left ajar, and satisfying themselves that the two ground floors were in fact identical. Farran was delighted with his own inspection. By electric light, at least, the two places were indistinguishable.

By now Farran had completed his plan of action and had mentally rehearsed every move he must make. He could do nothing more but wait for his opportunity. It would have to be on a Thursday, because that was the evening when Mrs. Lunn always got dinner early before going off at eight o'clock to the last performance at the local cinema. Uncle Charles, whose eyes troubled him a little, never went with her, but listened to the radio instead.

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The Thursday must be foggy. Sooner or later there was bound to be a foggy Thursday—and there was no urgent hurry. That was one of the beauties of the plan—it needn't be carried out until conditions were just right. Another thing that Farran liked about it was that until the very last moment he'd be uncommitted. If he was doubtful about anything, he could still draw back. Hopefully he awaited his chance.

It came on the third Thursday in November. The weather was very still, and fog began to close down over London in the middle of the afternoon. The forecast said it would be thick but not dense.

At 7:30 that evening he telephoned his uncle, as he often did, and had a friendly chat with him, and said he'd be around next evening for their game of chess. He learned that Mrs. Lunn was going to the pictures in spite of the fog because it was a Gregory Peck movie she didn't want to miss. That was the first hurdle.

He then rang up Irene and told her there was a possibility that this was the night, and that she had better go to the pictures herself, leaving everything behind her as they'd planned. Immediately afterward he set off in his car for the Cook Hotel, ten minutes from his house and fifteen from his uncle's, at a junction of roads called Five Ways. Since his wife had left him, he had dined frequently at the Cook.

By 7:50 he was in the dining room. The waiters all knew him. His alibi had begun. From now until 10:30 when Mrs. Lunn would get back from the cinema, it would be a matter of crucial importance for him that he should be in someone's sight all the time—all the time, of course, except for the three or four minutes when he would be at his uncle's.

He finished his dinner at 8:30. Then he went out into the hotel lobby, chatted for a moment with the receptionist, and got her to change a 50p coin so that he could telephone. In the hall booth he rang up Peter Hassall. This, he knew, was the moment when the plan might have to be scrapped for the night. Peter might be out. But he wasn't.

Hassall sounded surprised when he heard who was ringing. Farran laughed, and said that he'd called up on impulse—it could easily have waited till the next day, but the fact was he'd come to a decision that he thought Peter would like to hear about, and since it was always pleasant to convey good news, he was indulging himself by phoning. In short, he said, he'd decided to take Peter into partnership.

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The rest was simple. He didn't actually have to invite Peter to come round to his house and talk over the details. What he did say was that he'd jotted down the notes of a draft agreement, and that if it hadn't been so foggy he'd have suggested that Peter come round and discuss it with him, but probably he'd prefer to wait till morning. Peter, obviously delighted by the news, said he didn't at all mind the fog and would very much like to come round, only he had his fiancée Lesley with him.

Farran said that was all right, why not bring her too? They were only one Underground station away, and if they'd pick him up in the lounge of the Cook he'd drive them to his home and they could have a little celebration. Peter said fine, they'd be right along.

Farran hung up, congratulating himself that things couldn't have gone better. Now he'd have two witnesses instead of one. He was beginning to feel very excited. This, he felt sure, was the night. He went into the bar and chatted with the barman over a couple of brandies, to keep the alibi going.

It was 9:15 when Peter arrived with his girl. She was young and pretty, but rather shy. Peter introduced her, and said how wonderful they both thought Farran's news was, and then Farran took them out to his car. The fog was thicker and there was little traffic. Farran put Peter in the back of the car where—what with the fog and the misted windows—he wouldn't be able to see a thing en route.

Ten minutes later Farran was turning confidently into Irene's drive. She had left the garage doors open, and he drove straight in. His visitors, he knew, would have had no opportunity to notice either the name or the number of the house on the outer gate. He opened the front door with the key that Irene had mailed to him, and ushered his guests into the sitting room.

The room was warm and smelled of cigarette smoke, his brand, but nothing else. Farran took a quick look round to satisfy himself that Irene hadn't left any feminine belongings about and that everything was as it should be, then seated the young couple on the sofa. Peter, who had never been to Farran's house, looked approvingly around the room. Lesley admired a van Gogh print on the wall. Things were going fine.

Farran handed out cigarettes and made an informal little speech about Peter having carried the weight of the business for a long time and how it was only fair he should get a bit more of the

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reward. Then he suggested drinks. Peter, he knew, would like whiskey. What about Lesley? Lesley, it seemed, didn't go for whiskey. Well, he'd see what he could rustle up. The whiskey was in the car, but he wouldn't be long. Meanwhile perhaps they'd like to have a look at the notes he'd jotted down about the partnership. Perhaps, he added with a grin, they'd even like to fix their wedding day!

In the hall, the grin faded and for a second he hesitated. This was the point of no return. This was where theory became practice. The next few minutes wouldn't be pleasant. He had never used violence on anyone before. But the hesitation was only momentary. The stage was perfectly set. His witnesses suspected nothing. They were convinced that they were in his house, which was 20 minutes away from his uncle's. In five minutes' time he'd be the richer by a quarter of a million pounds. He must steel himself.

He went quickly into the kitchen and out through the back door to the car. From the trunk compartment he took a long plastic raincoat and a heavy hammer. He put the raincoat on and grasped the hammer and stole silently down the grass verge to the gate. The fog was so thick now that he could barely see across the road.

He was halfway up Uncle Charles's drive before he could make out the light in a front room. He stopped by the window, peering through a crack in the curtains. Uncle Charles was sitting slumped back in an easy chair, fast asleep. Perfect!

Farran walked round to the back door, opened it cautiously, and slipped inside. Everything was quiet. He tiptoed to the sitting room, gently opened the door, and looked in. His uncle hadn't stirred.

He crossed the carpet in two swift strides. He could just see the top of a shining bald head over the back of the chair. He raised the hammer and struck with all his strength—once, twice! His victim didn't even groan.

As soon as Farran had made sure that his uncle was dead, he unstrapped the old man's gold wrist watch, plucked the diamond pin from his tie, and removed the wallet from his breast pocket. The police probably wouldn't feel too satisfied with theft by a casual passer-by as an explanation of the murder, even on a night of fog, but it would be better than no explanation. Quickly Farran wrapped the things in the raincoat, with the hammer inside as a

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weight. Later that night, when he'd got rid of Peter and the girl, he would toss the bundle into one of the deep ponds near Five Ways. He took a last glance round, and went out.

The road was still quiet. He groped his way across to Irene's gate and walked back up the grass verge to the car. He locked the bundle in the trunk, grabbed an unopened bottle of whiskey, and returned to the kitchen.

He looked at his watch. Four minutes flat! He'd done an efficient job. He examined his hands and clothes and shoes to see if there was any blood on them, but there wasn't. He poured himself a shot of whiskey and drank it. Now he must go in to the others. He put the whiskey bottle on a tray, a tray just like one he had at home, with three glasses of a sort he also had at home, and a jug of water that he could duplicate, and a siphon.

Now what about something for the girl? He rummaged in Irene's cupboard and found a decanter with a glass or two of port in it. He had a decanter like that too. He hadn't any port at home, but that didn't matter—he'd simply say he'd washed up the decanter if anyone showed interest. He carried in the tray.

Peter and Lesley were sitting close together on the sofa, completely absorbed in themselves and their prospects. The four or five minutes had obviously seemed no time at all to them. Farran asked Lesley if she'd care for a glass of port. She looked at the tray and saw that he'd brought it especially for her and said she would. Farran poured the drinks and proposed a toast—to a successful partnership.

The young people were happy and at ease now, and responded gaily. Farran was tense. He wanted to get out. It wasn't at all likely that anyone would call at this time of night, in a fog—but if anyone did, he'd be in a spot. These were the moments of danger. Action had kept his nerve steady. Waiting undermined it.

Yet he couldn't hurry his guests away. He must go on chatting. He mentioned their wedding plans again, and asked them where they thought of living, and made small talk. The effort to behave naturally, politely, brought beads of sweat to his forehead. Once he thought he heard footsteps near the gate, and his mouth grew dry with fear. It was a false alarm, but he was shaken. He *must* get out.

The moment Peter's glass was empty he refilled it. "One for the road," he said. "And then I suppose we'd better be getting you home—the fog's thickening." He held the decanter invitingly to-

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ward Lesley. "Might as well finish it," he said. She smiled and gave him her glass and he refilled it, draining the decanter.

His hand was trembling, so that it was difficult to hold the decanter steady. This must be reaction. It was something he hadn't reckoned on. A hot mist blurred his vision. He turned and held out the glass, and Lesley put her hand out to take it, and between them they fumbled the transfer.

A second later the glass was on the floor, and a large port-wine stain had spread over the carpet in front of the fireplace.

There was confusion then for a moment or two. Lesley was apologizing, saying it was her fault, saying she had spoiled his lovely carpet. Farran was apologizing, saying it was his fault, and Peter was dabbing at a spot on Lesley's dress.

Farran was fighting to regain his composure, without much success. Sweat was pouring down his face. Lesley was looking at him oddly, or so he thought. He finished his drink. Peter finished his. With heartfelt relief Farran at last heard Peter say, "Well, I suppose we'd better be getting along." It was 10:05.

In a few minutes they were back in the car and on the move. It was something to be clear of the house, but now Farran had a new worry. That conspicuous port-wine stain could be a disaster. The two sitting rooms were no longer identical. But he couldn't work things out properly because Peter was talking—he'd have to wait until he was alone.

Meanwhile he must watch the time, for he still needed an alibi. It would be half an hour yet before Mrs. Lunn got home and found the body. To be on the safe side, he needed Peter's company for another 30 minutes or so. He crawled toward the road junction. The fog gave him every excuse. When they finally reached the Underground station, Farran strolled inside with the young people and asked the ticket man when the next train was due, to fix the time, and then saw them off unhurriedly. As he left the station, the clock in the hall showed 10:40. His alibi was complete—except for the stain.

Back in the car, it didn't take him long to get things sorted out. He'd been right—the stain *could* mean disaster. He could see only too well what might happen. By now Mrs. Lunn would have phoned the police. The police would question her. They'd hear about James Farran. They'd discover that he stood to gain tremendously from Uncle Charles's death.

Later that night they'd call at his house to question him.

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They'd probably want to look over the house. They'd ask him about his movements. He'd tell them. Then they'd check, all along the line. They'd probably see Peter and Lesley first, because the staff at the Cook would have dispersed for the night. They'd decide that his story was true as far as the young couple were concerned.

But what about earlier? They might well ask Peter and Lesley if his behavior had appeared normal during the evening, or if he'd seemed at all upset. The girl might easily mention the spilled port. The police would remember that there had been no spilled port on the carpet they'd seen in his house. And that would be that. And they'd never rest then until they'd found the right house—and knew everything.

Of course, it might not happen that way. The port might not be mentioned. But it was a risk that Farran couldn't take.

There was only one way to safety. He must spill some port on *his* carpet too, before the police arrived. But he hadn't any port at home. And the pubs were all shut. No help there. Yet he must have it. *Where could he get some port?*

He was desperate now. So desperate that he even had the wild notion of trying to break into the bar of the Cook. But there'd be people upstairs—someone would be sure to hear him. Then he suddenly had another idea, a much better one.

There was, he remembered, a liquor store on one of the roads running out of Five Ways. It was in the center of a row of shops. No one lived there at night. And there'd be plenty of port on the shelves.

Hope surged again. He might still pull it off. He even knew how he'd break in—a minor accident with the car in the fog! First, though, he must get rid of that incriminating bundle in the trunk. He slipped the car into gear and crawled from lamp to lamp until he reached the biggest of the ponds. He stopped the engine and listened. He could hear traffic in the distance, muted by the fog, but around him all was quiet.

He took the bundle and hurled it well out over the water. It splashed, and was gone. He reversed the car and returned to Five Ways. He found the road he wanted, and crawled up to the row of shops. By the light of his fog lamps he could just make out the bottles in the window of the liquor store. The shop had a glass door. He turned the car toward the pavement and mounted the curb. He braced himself and drove for the door at an angle.

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There was a crash as his front bumper rammed hard against the door. A jagged hole appeared in the glass, big enough for him to squeeze through. He backed the car away quickly. Speed was everything now—the crash was sure to bring someone to the scene, and the last thing he wanted was to be mixed up in an accident at a liquor store.

He scrambled out of the car and eased himself through the shattered door. The whole shop was lit by his lights. He glanced along the shelves. Sherry! Whiskey! *Port*! He grabbed a bottle and turned for the door. At that moment he heard raised voices along the street. He tore through the door. As he did so, a fierce pain seared his wrist. But he didn't have time to worry about a cut just then. He hurled himself into the car, backed down the curb, and roared away into the fog.

He hadn't driven more than 20 yards before he realized that his wrist was pouring blood. He could feel it soaking through his clothes. The wheel was slippery with it. It was even on the windshield. He must have cut himself badly. He'd better stop and see what the damage was.

He turned into a side road, a dead end, where he'd be safe from discovery. He switched on the inside light and looked at his wrist. Blood was coming out in great jets. Good lord, he must have severed an artery! He needed a tourniquet. He must get help. Quickly too!—he was beginning to feel faint.

He fumbled for the gear lever, but he couldn't get the gear in. He hadn't the strength. He tried to press the horn, but his fingers slid off the ring. He sank back against the seat, his forehead cold and clammy. Everything was growing dark. In a few more seconds consciousness slipped away . . .

The police found him in the morning, when the fog lifted. By then he'd been dead for hours. They found the bottle of port beside him, with a price tag still round its neck. That made them wonder about the "accident."

When the police got around to questioning Peter and Lesley, they mentioned the bottle of port. They heard about the stain on the carpet. At Farran's house they discovered there was no stain. It took them a little while to check on similar houses in the district. By the time they came to Irene's house she was gone. They caught her at Southampton the next day. She had just booked a passage on a cruise liner.

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*Judge, jury, and executioner . . .*

# AN INSIGNIFICANT CRIME

**by MAXINE O'CALLAGHAN**

When the shop bell rang, I looked up from the account books and groaned. I had enough trouble managing the old man lately without that woman coming around to ruin things completely.

He watched her grimly, his mouth thinned to a tight, self-righteous line—judge, jury, and executioner. I closed the books and hurried to the end of the counter.

"Father, please," I said.

"Please nothing. I meant what I said. If that woman steals something today, I'll turn her over to the authorities."

I kept my voice low, but his was rising in agitation. "Let's go back into the office and talk," I urged quietly. A glassed-in area lay directly behind the counter where it was possible to work and watch the aisles at the same time. He hung back stubbornly, but I coaxed him in and closed the door.

"There's no reason to discuss it," he said.

"There's every reason. Her father has a lot of influence in this town. If you think you can humiliate him without reprisal, you're dangerously mistaken. If she takes something, why can't you simply charge it to his account as you've done in the past?"

"Because it's wrong, that's why. I've compromised my principles long enough."

I began to sweat. The room was oppressively hot but that was only partly the reason. I was shaking with inner rage. The old fool couldn't see beyond the end of his thin quivering nose. He would sacrifice the business and our future, his daughter's and mine, and feel smugly sanctimonious. And for what? An insignificant little crime that would hurt nobody.

"You mustn't judge the poor woman," I said, trying to think of a way to avoid the clash that was sure to come. "Her father says it's a sickness."

"Rubbish. She's a thief, and worse, she makes no attempt to

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hide it." His jaw set obstinately. There was not a drop of perspiration on that cold forehead. "I tell you I have my principles, though your generation wouldn't understand that. All you value is the dollar."

You should talk, I thought grimly. I've worked for him long enough to know how he cheats his customers. Nothing big or obvious—just a niggling penny here and there or merchandise a bit substandard. My one comfort was that he could not live forever. My wife was his only child, born late. If I hung on, the store would eventually be mine—a starting point for the ideas and plans that churned impatiently inside my head. I couldn't allow him to throw everything away because of his singleminded morality.

He kept watch like a hangman waiting on the scaffold, but I began to feel a little hope. She walked up and down the aisles fingering things and dropping them back in the bins. Perhaps the whole thing would blow over. She didn't *always* steal. It's the weather, I told myself. For weeks the heat had clamped down like the lid on a boiling pot, shredding nerves and stoking tempers. Go away, I pleaded silently; make your purchase and get out of here.

It was too late for prayers. Her plump fingers had chosen their prize for the day, bold as brass. The old man sucked in his breath sharply and prepared to charge out of the office, but I grabbed him.

"I won't let you do this," I said.

"You can't stop me." He tried to shake me off but I hung on tenaciously. "This is my store. I know you're waiting anxiously for me to die so you can get your hands on it, but at present I am very much alive and I'll do as I please."

"Go ahead then," I said recklessly, "but listen carefully. If you do this, I'm leaving. You spend a lot of time belittling me, but you're not a stupid man. You're crafty enough to recognize the amount of work I put into this store. The truth is, you can no longer handle the business alone."

"Don't be ridiculous," he snapped, but he hesitated.

"I have another opportunity." It was a blatant lie, but I was desperate. "I'll take it tomorrow. You'll lose not only my help but your daughter and grandson as well."

He licked his lips, but I could read nothing in those hooded, fish-gray eyes. It took every ounce of my will power to fold my arms and lean casually against a desk, to pretend I could breathe the hot soggy air.

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"Well," I said. "Exactly how much are your principles worth to you?"

He didn't answer, just turned his back on me and went out to the counter where the woman waited with a few pennies' worth of nails to legitimatize her visit. I thought his walk seemed slower than usual and his shoulders drooped, but I couldn't be certain. I followed him with my heart thudding painfully against my ribs, convinced that I had made a ghastly mistake and ruined my future.

He accepted payment without a word or a look at her large shopping basket where the hatchet handle was plainly visible. He even managed a stiff nod and a "Good afternoon, Miss Lizzie," while I breathed a shaky, victorious sigh and made a note to charge the stolen ax to Mr. Borden's account.

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*The man with the revolver gestured. "You're being kidnaped, mister. Don't struggle, do as you're told, and you won't be harmed. Otherwise, you're dead."*

*"The price of wisdom is above rubies."—The Bible. Old Testament. Job. XXVIII, 18.*

# THE PRICE OF WISDOM

**by R. L. STEVENS**

The nightmare began on a Monday in May, when I stepped off the afternoon shuttle flight from Boston and caught a taxi for Martha's third-floor apartment overlooking Gramercy Park. It was a sunny day in Manhattan and my spirits were high. I'd have two nights with Martha before returning home. With luck I might even take care of the business which was this month's excuse for the trip.

Martha Gaddis was my mistress. It's a word that's rarely used in these liberated times, but that's what she was, nevertheless. I didn't actually support her to the extent of paying the rent on her five-room apartment, but when I made my monthly trips to New York—to check on the diamond merchants along 47th Street or the antique jewelry at the little shops on upper Madison Avenue—she was always there waiting for me.

Of course my wife Joan didn't know about Martha Gaddis. She thought I stayed at the apartment of an old army buddy when I was in New York. Maybe she had her suspicions, but if so she never voiced them. It was probably better that way. Having Martha, after all, didn't mean that I loved Joan any less. Joan was my wife and the mother of our two children. That was one life.

Martha, and the apartment on Gramercy Park, was another life.

This day she greeted me at the door, as she always did when I phoned from the airport. I could describe Martha by calling her a chic blonde, but that was only the surface woman. Actually she was an artist and a poet, merging two ill-paying professions into a

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sort of livelihood. She never asked me for money, though I insisted on leaving her some each month, if only to pay for the groceries I consumed. I didn't think about what she did in her spare time the rest of the month. If there were other shuttle flights, from Washington or Chicago or Detroit, I didn't want to know about them.

"Jeff, darling," she said in that familiar soft voice, running a hand along my cheek. "It's been so long!"

"Only four weeks."

"It seems a lifetime."

I hung my suitcoat in the front closet and dropped my attaché case on a convenient chair. Then I gave her a long kiss. "It seems a lifetime for me too," I agreed. "How've you been?"

"Fine. Lonesome."

"I wrote you."

"One letter in four weeks! I get that much from Con Edison!"

Traditionally, the first night's dinner was eaten at her apartment. Martha was a good cook, and this night, as we dined by the window overlooking the park, she was filling me in on the history of the area.

"Until 1830 it was a farm belonging to a man named Samuel Ruggles," she said over coffee and dessert. "Then he divided it to form the present park, Most of these houses date from about 1840, and one of them—Number Four—was the home of New York's mayor, James Harper, in 1844. A few decades later Samuel Tilden, the almost-president of 1876, lived at Number Fifteen. And Edwin Booth the actor was at Number Sixteen."

"You should write a book about it," I told her half in jest. She had a way of going off on subjects like that, pouring out more knowledge than I really cared to hear.

She started to reply but was interrupted by the buzzer. "Who could that be?"

"One of your other lovers," I ventured.

"Some joke!" She spoke through the intercom, asking who was there, but nobody answered. The buzzing kept on. Finally, in exasperation, she unbolted the door. "They probably want one of the other tenants."

Then I heard her scream, not loud, and she tumbled backward through the doorway, landing on the rug. I was out of my chair, crossing the room to her side, when I saw the man in the doorway.

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He wore a stocking mask over his head and carried a small revolver. Behind him was a second man, also masked, who held what looked like a sawed-off shotgun.

"What in hell is this? Who are you?" I bent over to help Martha.

"Stay away from her!" the man with the revolver ordered. His voice was brisk and authoritative. "You're Jeff Michaels, right?"

The sound of my name on that man's lips sent a chill through me. This was no ramdon holdup. They were after me and they'd found me. In that wild instant a dozen thoughts crowded my brain. Had Joan learned about Martha and me and sent these people to kill me? No, that was fantastic!

"I'm Michaels," I managed to get out. "What do you want?"

"We're taking you along. Tell the lady not to call the police if she ever wants to see you alive again."

Martha was still on the floor, sheer terror on her face. "Jeff, what do they want?"

"I can't imagine."

The man with the revolver gestured. "You're being kidnaped, mister. Don't struggle, do as you're told, and you won't be harmed. Otherwise, you're dead."

"Kidnaped! I don't have any—"

"Shut up!" While the second man covered me with the shotgun, the first one took out a hypodermic needle. "This won't hurt you and it won't knock you out. It'll just make you a little fuzzy-headed and willing to come with us. It's this or a rap on the head. Take your choice."

"What sort of choice is that?" I mumbled. But I didn't resist when he plunged the needle through my shirt and into my arm.

"Now tell the lady not to call the police. You don't want it all over the papers that you were kidnaped from your girl friend's apartment, do you?"

"I—no." The injection was already beginning to take effect. I turned to Martha. "I'll be all right. Don't call the police."

"Jeff!"

"We won't hurt him, lady, as long as you both behave."

Then they slipped on my jacket and hustled me out the door to the elevator. A part of me was past all caring, but another part still hoped someone would see us and raise an alarm.

They kept me to one side till they saw the elevator was empty, then prodded me in with their guns. We rode down to the base-

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ment and they took me out the back door to a waiting car. In the back seat the one with the revolver said, "Now you'll be blindfolded from here on. If you remove the blindfold and see our faces, or see the place where we take you, we'll have to kill you. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

He fitted some sort of goggles over my face that effectively blocked all vision. Then he ordered me onto the floor of the back seat and covered me with a blanket. We drove for about a half hour, as near as I could tell, but in my drugged state it might have been longer. It was impossible to concentrate on direction, or even to determine whether or not we passed over a bridge going out of Manhattan.

Presently the car stopped and the revolver prodded me once more. "We're here. No tricks now."

They led me inside a building and up several flights of stairs. I tried to listen for sounds but I heard nothing. It was an apartment somewhere in the city, but I could tell no more. The floor was bare, without even a rug, and in the room where I was to be kept there seemed to be no bed. "You'll use that sleeping bag," the man's voice told me. "If your wife pays off, it won't be for long."

The drug was beginning to wear off, and I tried to reason with him. "Look, this diamond ring I'm wearing is worth two thousand dollars. Take it, and my watch and wallet. Then let me go."

"We're after far bigger stakes, Michaels. Pretty soon we're going to phone your wife in Boston and you'll tell her what we want."

"What's that? I'm not a wealthy man."

"You're wealthy enough for us. We know all about your jewelry business."

I realized it had all been carefully planned. "How much do you want?" I asked at last.

"A quarter of a million dollars in uncut rubies."

"Rubies!"

"We have a market for them overseas, and we know they're available through your business. Your wife will phone the manager tomorrow and convey your instructions. If he won't surrender the gems, you may have to phone him too. Your wife will package them as we instruct and fly to New York tomorrow afternoon. The package will be left in a ladies' room at LaGuardia Airport. Your

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wife will board the next shuttle flight back to Boston. Once the rubies are safely in our hands, without police interference, you'll be released."

A little later they made their call. The telephone was thrust into my hands and I heard Joan's puzzled voice on the other end. "Jeff? What is it?"

Trying to keep my voice calm, I answered, "Don't get excited. I've been kidnaped."

"What!"

"Calm yourself, Joan. I'm in no danger if you do exactly what they tell you. And don't call the police."

"My God, Jeff! What do they want?"

"A quarter million dollars in uncut rubies. You'll have to get them from the company vault and fly to New York with them tomorrow. This man will tell you exactly what to do."

My captor took the phone and spoke distinctly. "We won't contact you again, Mrs. Michaels, so listen carefully." He outlined the procedure to be followed, including the plane she should take the next day and the place where the package should be left. "There's a wastebasket for paper towels. Wrap the package in a couple of paper towels and drop it in. Then leave immediately and take the shuttle back to Boston."

"I—I don't think I can get the rubies that soon," Joan said. I could hear her voice coming from the receiver.

"Your husband will call his manager and take care of that. You just pick them up."

"Can I talk to him again?"

"Do as you're told and he'll be free by tomorrow night. Otherwise he'll be dead."

He hung up but I could feel his presence near me still. "We'd better call your manager and arrange for the pickup of the rubies. We don't want any slips."

I talked to George Franklin on the phone and told him what had happened, emphasizing he must not call the police. He was a frightened little man at the best of times, and the news of my kidnaping completely unnerved him.

"A quarter million uncut!" he protested. "I don't think we have that much in rubies."

"Then get them! Draw some money out of the special account and buy them from Craig or Morton. They'll have enough to make up the difference."

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"All right." He sounded reluctant.

"These men mean business, George."

"All right," he repeated.

After the phone calls they handcuffed me and gave me another injection, putting me into the sleeping bag for the night. I slept better than I'd expected, helped no doubt by the powerful tranquilizing drug. When I awakened in the morning they brought me a light breakfast—orange juice in a plain water glass and a piece of toast on a paper plate.

I could tell nothing about my surroundings, though occasional street noises penetrated the room. Sitting on the floor with my meager breakfast, I might have been on another planet. I knew that one of the two men was in the room, watching me, and since he didn't speak I suspected it was the silent one with the shotgun.

I found myself feeling for the walls, trying to leave a mark that might be identified later. But they were smoothly painted and any smudges I might make could easily be wiped away. In my hands were a paper plate that would be disposed of and a water glass.

The glass was my only chance to leave some sign, and it was a slim one. I waited till I heard my captor step out of the room momentarily and then I finished the juice and turned the glass upside down. Working quickly, I used my diamond ring to scratch a crude JM on the bottom of the glass. I couldn't see how successful I was, of course. It might not show at all—or it might be so obvious they'd see it at once and throw away the glass. But it was my only chance.

They gave me another injection after breakfast and I dozed off and on through the rest of the day. With my eyes covered it was impossible to tell when day ended and night began, and once after waking I called out to ask what time it was. The man with the revolver came into the room and answered that it was late afternoon. He said he was waiting for his partners to pick up the rubies.

"You'd better pray there are no cops," he said.

"What good would it do you to kill me?"

I heard him go out of the room without answering.

After a time I lifted my handcuffed wrists and felt the goggles around my eyes. I'd been considering risking a peek at my surroundings, but I discovered that broad pieces of tape had been added. I settled back against the wall, discouraged.

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Presently I heard the apartment door open and then the low murmur of voices. I held my breath, half expecting a bullet at any moment. Or a fatal injection from which I would never awaken. I had a fleeting memory of Martha, huddled on the floor where she'd fallen. And Joan. Had she flown to New York with the rubies? Did she really care whether I lived or died? How hard would it be for her to keep the rubies and only pretend to have made delivery? She'd be rid of me, and she'd have a quarter of a million dollars to start a new life as the bereaved widow.

If that's what she wanted.

I heard someone enter the room.

It was the man with the revolver, the talkative one. "Your wife delivered," he said. "Right on schedule. This must be your lucky day."

"You mean I can go?"

"We'll wait till it gets dark, then take you out and dump you somewhere. Don't worry, we're not going to harm you."

His words were reassuring, but when you're blindfolded and handcuffed it takes more than reassuring words. Wouldn't he tell me exactly the same thing if they meant to take me out and dump my body in the river?

The next hours passed slowly. They fed me again—a sandwich on a paper plate followed by a cup of instant coffee—and then made preparations to leave. I was taken down the stairs and this time I tried to count the flights. There seemed to be four of them, but I was pretty certain we emerged into a basement. That would mean I'd been kept on the third floor.

"Into the back seat," the man ordered, "and no tricks. We'd really hate to shoot you this close to letting you go."

They drove me around for the better part of an hour, or at least it seemed that long. Finally the car stopped at a curb and I was shoved out. By the time I tore the tape and goggles from my eyes the car was out of sight.

I was somewhere uptown, near Riverside Drive, but I couldn't identify the exact spot. Still handcuffed, I struggled to a corner phone booth. There was a dime among the change in my pocket and I dialed Martha's apartment.

"My God, Jeff—where are you? I've been frantic since last night!"

"I'm free and I'm unharmed. My wife delivered the ransom. I'll tell you everything later. Look, call the police and tell them I'm

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at the corner of"—I glanced up at the sign—"98th Street and West End Avenue."

I waited in the phone booth, oblivious of passersby, until the police car arrived.

My story was that I'd been kidnaped while visiting a client, and the police didn't press the matter. Martha was interviewed, and the press took pictures, and back in Boston, Joan questioned me about Martha. But if she suspected the truth she didn't pursue it. I was back, all in one piece, and after a week's run in the newspapers the story died down. I had George Franklin checking with the insurance company to see what coverage we carried. Certainly it was a theft and certainly they should pay.

Only once, a few weeks later, when I mentioned the need for another trip to New York, did Joan hint that she knew the truth about Martha. "New York again? You'd better stay away from that client this time."

But of course I didn't stay away.

I went back to Gramercy Park, back to Martha's arms, because that's where I'd always belong. The only difference was that I carried a pistol now, to guard against any future surprises.

"I'm glad you're back," Martha said, kissing me softly. "I think those two days were the worst of my life, Jeff. Not knowing where you were, afraid to call the police . . ."

"They weren't much fun for me either," I said, considering for the first time what it might be like to leave Joan and marry Martha. I wondered if men ever married their mistresses.

"What are you thinking about, Jeff?"

"Us, I guess."

"Do you think they'll ever catch the kidnapers?"

"Probably not. Unless they try the same sort of thing again."

She patted my arm. "Come on, dear, come to bed."

"Gladly."

I went to the kitchen for a glass of water. I was just setting the glass down by the sink when I noticed the two crudely scratched initials on the bottom of the glass.

"Q"

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 457th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . .a seemingly straightforward mid-Western Sheriff story—but with a snapper. . .*

*The author, Gary W. Campbell, was twenty-six when he submitted "Missing Persons Case." He is married, has a baby daughter, and for the past eight years has been a disc jockey and broadcast engineer. His hobbies include "target shooting with a handgun, rebuilding and driving a sports car, and camping, usually with the typewriter along." We will hear more from Mr. Campbell—Sheriff Hoagy Hogan is too shrewd a lawman not to have other interesting cases in his past. . .*

# MISSING PERSONS CASE

**by GARY W. CAMPBELL**

It was a warm summer's day with the puffy white clouds and bright blue sky found only in the plains states. Parking the tan squad car with the gold six-pointed star on the door, Sheriff Hoagy Hogan climbed laboriously out. He adjusted his gun belt under the belly it had taken him 45 years to achieve and sauntered toward the deputy's car. He didn't turn on his flashing lights; the deputy's seemed enough.

Bart Miller, the twenty-year-old, tall, gawky deputy, ran toward him, relief on his freckled face. Hoag noticed red dust on the deputy's gray-uniformed knees. Not far behind Bart, the squat, heavily jowled construction foreman and one of the burly hard-hatted workers followed.

"I'm sure glad to see you, Hoag," Bart said.

"What've you got?" the sheriff asked in a slightly bored voice.

"One of the bulldozers dug somebody up."

Hoag raised a hand to stop the deputy. "Who found it?"

"I did, sir," the construction worker said. "I'm Bill Matthews."

Taking a kitchen match from his shirt pocket, Hoag stuck it in

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his mouth and nodded to Matthews. "Tell me just like it happened."

Matthews rubbed a weatherbeaten face. "I was leveling that bump by the river," he said, pointing. "The new bridge will cross there. I backed the dozer off because it was lunchtime, and as I climbed off, I saw something white. It was a skull."

"You leave it where you found it?"

"Sure, Sheriff—didn't touch it. But I can't tell you exactly where the dozer picked it up. I cut about a twenty-yard swath."

Hoag turned to McClary, the foreman. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to hold up the project. Don't know how long yet." McClary scowled and nodded. Turning back to his deputy, Hoag said, "Call Doc Hudson?"

"Yes, sir. He's on the way."

"How many people know about this?" the sheriff asked.

McClary answered. "I told everyone to take a long lunch. Just the four of us here know."

A ten-year-old black Cadillac stopped behind the sheriff's car, and a man with a fringe of white hair climbed out. "What you got here, Hoag?" he called.

"I ain't seen it yet, Doc. Come on."

They all followed Matthews to the dozer, and Doc Hudson knelt by the skull. "What do you think?" Hoag asked, squatting next to him and sucking on the match.

"Female," the doctor told him. "About twenty give or take a couple of years."

Hoag felt a tightness in his gut. He couldn't decide whether to grimace or smile. He did a little of both. "Think you can make an I.D.?"

Hudson shrugged. "Frankly, I don't know. Find me the rest of her."

"How long's she been there?" Hoag asked, almost holding his breath.

The doctor shook his head. "No way to tell here. Want me to take her with me?"

Standing, Hoag stretched with his fist in his back and considered for a moment. "I think I know who it is, Doc. I think I'm going to close a case twenty years old. You take the skull with you, though, and see if you can make anything of it."

Hoag turned back to his deputy. "Round up the rest of our so-called police force. I want this kept hushed up, and I want you

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and the rest to find the skeleton." He shifted his gaze to the construction foreman. "McClary, tell your people they got today and tomorrow off. Maybe the day after, we'll see. If I don't have all I need by then, there won't be enough." His eyes half closed, and a gleam peeked out of them. "I've got to talk to some people."

Hoag stopped at his office and dug a folder out of the Unsolved File. He read it over, then tucked it under his arm and went back to the car.

Nancy Carswell had disappeared almost 20 years before. She'd been 19. A deputy sheriff at the time, Hoagy Hogan was convinced that Nancy had been killed by Ray Fielding, her stepfather. He could never prove it because he couldn't find a body. Now, certain the skull was Nancy's, he intended to double-check with the surviving witnesses and then have a chat with Fielding.

He couldn't talk to one of the witnesses. Frannie Amos had died eight years before at 93. Frannie had told young deputy Hogan that she'd seen Nancy running down the road toward the Washita River. Nancy hadn't been carrying luggage, and about ten minutes later, Fielding's car had gone down that same road at high speed. She said Fielding passed her place back and forth ten times before night finally fell, but he didn't seem to really be looking for anything.

Hoag's first stop was at the local feed and grain store. Juan Hernandez, who owned it, had been a ranch hand at the Fielding place. His memory of what he'd seen that night was just as clear as on the day Hoag first started that file twenty years before.

Nancy had run from the house to her car. Her blouse had been torn. After trying unsuccessfully to start her car, she ran down the road. About ten minutes later, Fielding came out of the house, visibly angry. He got into his car and followed Nancy. He came back just after dark, and to Hernandez he no longer seemed angry.

Sarah Arbetter lived in a shack on the east side of town where the river touched the city limits. When Hoag arrived, she had her fishing pole stuck out the back window, dangling the line into the river. Chewing on the now-soggy match, Hoag leaned against the window. "How's your memory?" he asked.

"How's your memory?" he asked.

Sarah pushed her coarse silver hair from her eyes with a gnarled hand. "I ain't but sixty-one years old, Hoagy Hogan. I can still remember being birthed."

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Hoag spat out a piece of match. "About Nancy Carswell."

Before speaking, Sarah reeled in her fishing line and put the pole away. She leaned against the window sill to get a better look at the sheriff. "That was a long time ago, Hoag, but I remember it like yesterday. What brings it up now?"

"I think we found her body," he said unemotionally. His gaze remained on the churning water.

Sarah sighed heavily. "Buried by the river like we thought?"

"Yep. I'd like you to remember back and tell me like I didn't know anything about it."

"Okay, Hoag," she said, nodding. "I stayed on as cook after Mrs. Fielding died, mainly to take care of Nancy. She was supposed to go to college that year, but her mother's death just took all the steam out of her. Well, she was beginning to get over it. Then after living in the same house with her for three years, Ray Fielding finally noticed she was a woman. Boy, did he notice!"

"Ray make advances?"

"You bet he did," Sarah growled, "but Nancy did her best to ignore him. After all, he had been her mother's husband. Anyways, I don't think she liked Ray very much."

Hoag still leaned against the building, his only movement in the jerking match. "What happened that night?" he asked.

Sarah pulled a thin black cigar from her shirt pocket and took her time lighting it. Hoag's nose winced. "Well, it all came to a head that night," she said. "Ray finally got so direct that she couldn't pretend she didn't understand any more. Of course, she turned him down flat. I was in the kitchen, and they were in the dining room. I could hear real good. Ray, he got mad and started calling her names and said how she owed him.

"Well, Nancy ran up to her room, and I guess started to pack. He followed, and I kept my distance, but I went up there too. They had a big fight in her room. I heard him rip her blouse, then there was a scuffle, and she came running out. She wasn't bothering with no luggage either." Sarah chuckled. "After she was gone, since Ray didn't come out, I went in. She'd knocked him cold with a lamp."

"How long was he unconscious, Sarah?"

"Oh, about ten minutes, I guess. I didn't help him, you see, because I was afraid he'd wake up sooner. I wanted Nancy to have all the lead she could get. 'Course, I didn't realize then that she hadn't taken her car."

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"Then he went after her?" Hoag prompted.

"Yeah, burning up the road with that fancy convertible of his. I figured she was safe by then. Ray would cool down when he couldn't find her, and he'd at least let her come back for her things. Didn't figure she'd want to live at the ranch any more."

"Probably wouldn't have," Hoag said, flipping the remains of his match into the river. None of this was new, but maybe with the skull, it would now be enough. "What then?" he asked.

"Well, he came in about dark. He was calmer, and he said he was worried. Told me she hadn't taken her car and that he'd looked all over for her and couldn't find her. He was very apologetic and sorry for the way he'd acted."

That covered everything she'd told him 20 years ago. He sighed heavily. "Anything else you can add, Sarah?"

"No, Sheriff. That's about all there was to it. 'Cept, of course, that nobody ever saw Nancy again."

Nodding, Hoag frowned. "Thanks a lot, Sarah." He started to leave.

"Now, wait a minute, Hoag." He turned back. Sarah was scratching her chin. "He had a button missing from that fancy suitcoat he was wearing. At the time I thought he lost it during that scuffle in Nancy's room, but I never did find it."

Hogan almost smiled. "You'd know that button if you saw it again?"

Her face screwed up angrily. "Sure would. It was made of bone, and he told me it was Indian's bones. Said it was probably some of my ancestors killed by his ancestors."

Hoag drove across the cattle guard under the old timber archway leading to the Fielding ranch. The last word of the *Trespassers Will Be Shot* sign had been painted over to read *Prosecuted*, and the cars and equipment were newer, but other than that the ranch looked much the same as it had 20 years before.

Hoag passed acres of pasture land and finally stopped in the oval drive near the double front doors. As he walked up, he counted seven marble steps. He knocked on one of the carved oak doors and waited till a young Mexican in a white jacket opened it.

"Sheriff Hogan," he said. "I've come to see Mr. Fielding."

The young man stepped aside. "In the study," he said with the slightest trace of accent.

"I know the way," Hoag told him.

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The door to the study was open, and the sheriff paused there for a moment, watching Fielding go over some paperwork. The wood paneling was dark and rich, the carpet plush and expensive. It was the same, but Fielding had changed. His hair was white, though still thick, and his face badly wrinkled. Burst veins colored his nose. Too much booze, Hoag thought.

"Ray," the sheriff finally said.

Fielding glanced up. "Oh, Sheriff. Come in. Take a seat. What can I do for you?"

Hoag didn't sit. He leaned against the door facing and watched his man carefully. "It's about a missing-person report you filed twenty years ago. We've found Nancy."

A white eyebrow arched, and Fielding clenched an empty cigarette holder in his teeth. "Really?" he said.

"Yeah," Hoag said a bit more coldly than he intended, "really. I've wondered about one thing ever since I read that first report, Ray. Why didn't she take her car when she ran away?"

Fielding shrugged. "Beats me. The deputy who came here at the time tried the car, and it started."

"Nancy didn't know anything about cars, did she?"

"I suppose not. That young deputy was you, wasn't it, Hoag?"

The sheriff nodded. "I've always wondered about that spot on her coil wire where the grease was wiped off. It looked like someone had taken it off and put it back on. That's premeditation, Ray."

"Where did you find her?" Fielding asked.

"Near the bank of the Washita, Ray," Hogan said disinterestedly. "Right where you buried her."

"I didn't kill her," Fielding said as if bored of repeating the line. "I never could find her that night."

"I can't believe that, Ray," Hoag said, finally stepping into the room. "I didn't then, and I don't now. But now I've got proof. Her skeleton was found this morning. There was a bone button in what used to be her fist, and Sarah Arbetter identified it as the one missing from the coat you wore that night."

Fielding shrank in his chair as if all the air had gone out of him. "I searched and searched for that damn button." He glanced up at Hogan. "I'm sixty-seven years old, Hoag. I'm tired of Nancy wrecking my sleep. I'm glad it's over."

Taking his handcuffs from his pocket, Hoag approached him. "Shall we?" . . .

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Hoag sat at his desk, writing his report. He'd had to tell Fielding a couple of lies, but there was no law against that. Now, while the rest of the force was still searching for a skeleton, a deputy was typing up Fielding's confession. Though Hogan was closing a twenty-year-old murder case, he didn't feel any satisfaction. It never brought them back.

Doc Hudson entered the office and sat in the chair next to the sheriff's desk. "Got some word on your skull, Hoag." The sheriff didn't brighten much. "It's Indian," Hudson went on, "probably Kiowa. At least a hundred and fifty years old. I'm going to call State University. There must be a burial mound somewhere around there, and they'll want to know about it."

Hoag settled back in his chair and thought, his face impassive. "No way it could be more recent?"

"No way."

The sheriff punched his intercom button. "Bart, listen to what I tell the doctor. It goes for you too."

"Yes, sir."

Leaving the intercom open, Hogan nodded to himself and wandered to the file cabinet. "Remember Rena Adams? She married Wesley Herman. About a year after they married, she turned up missing. Wes said they had a fight, and she went home, but she never got to her mother's. She was last seen strolling with Wes near the river bank." He pulled the file and turned to the doctor. "Before anyone finds out how old that skull is, I've got some people I want to talk to—about the Rena Adams case."

"Q"

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 458th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a harrowing incident in the life of an old hitchhiker. . .*

*The author, John B. Birge, describes himself as a "senior engineering writer in the telecommunications industry." He was born in Washington, D.C., has lived in the British West Indies, served in the U.S. Navy in the South Pacific, lived in New Mexico, and now resides in California. His hobbies include writing, playing tennis, listening to jazz and classical music, and watching the performing arts. Against this background, his choice of theme for his first published fiction is rather surprising. . .*

# ON THE ROAD

**by JOHN B. BIRGE**

From where the old man stood, the highway ran straight to the horizon in either direction. He faced west. The early rising sun was uncomfortably warm on his back and he could already feel the heat from the black top radiating through the soles of his shoes.

"It's going to be a scorcher all right. Hope I get a ride soon," he thought aloud, in the unselfconscious way of a man used to living alone. "Maybe I should've caught the bus, but hitchhiking's faster and usually more comfortable."

As if to verify his ruminations, a small fast-moving object appeared on the horizon. Man, he's really traveling, the old man thought as he assumed the classic hitchhiker's posture—arm out from the shoulder, forearm up at a right angle, fingers curled against the palm, and thumb outstretched.

The moving object resolved into an automobile running at high speed. It was perhaps a hundred yards off when the old man observed it slowing down and knew he had a ride. The driver skill-

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fully brought the vehicle to a smooth stop half a dozen yards beyond the hitchhiker.

Hurrying forward, the old man noticed the driver was a tall young man, with an attractive young woman seated beside him. As he opened the rear door, a current of cool air against his face told him the car was air-conditioned. The radio was tuned to an all-night station, featuring country and western music.

He was still relishing this bit of good fortune and settling back in the seat when he saw the gun—lying on the seat between the driver and the woman. The old man slumped back, closing his eyes in simulated fatigue, to conceal his dismay.

Come on, old man, this is Arizona and guns ain't that uncommon, he thought, and opened his eyes as the car started forward. His gaze was immediately caught by the driver's eyes in the rear-view mirror. "How do you like my gun, Old Timer? It's an Army .45—picked it up in a hockshop in Tucson yesterday. They say it'll blow a hole in a man you can put your fist through." The tone was casual and friendly, but the old man detected a slightly mocking note.

He was casting about for a suitable reply when the woman spoke up. "You'd better slow down, Sugar. You wouldn't want the highway patrol to catch you now, would you?" She finished with a forced laugh which, to the old man's ears, held a small note of hysteria.

The red speedometer indicator was edging toward 80. The driver's laugh was mirthless. "No, that would never do. It might embarrass our friend in the back seat." The car slowed until the indicator held steady, halfway between 70 and 75. Above the legal limit, but not enough to attract attention.

The hitchhiker let his head fall back and again he feigned sleep, while considering the situation with some anxiety. Aw, it's just your imagination, the gun's got your wind up, he concluded. So reasoning and lulled by the car's motion, he actually dozed off.

The car rushed on, its odometer clicking off the miles as the driver maintained a steady speed. They crossed the state line and headed eastward across New Mexico.

Soon they were entering Lordsburg, slowing for the town although it was still too early for traffic. The change in speed awakened the hitchhiker. "Say, Old Timer, you never said how far you're going." Half awake, the old man answered truthfully and without thinking, "Amarillo."

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The sound level from the radio increased with the crisp voice of an announcer: "And now the early morning news. First, a bulletin just off the wire. All citizens are requested to be on the lookout for an escaped convict from the Arizona State Prison. Joseph O'Brien, age 32, six feet two inches tall, weight 200 pounds, dark hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion. O'Brien is probably armed and must be considered dangerous."

The man at the wheel growled, "That's enough of that! Let's get some music!" The driver punched a push-button and strains of "Pistol-Packin' Momma" filled the car.

The old man was fully awake now, his previous misgivings crystallized into real fear. Oh, God, what am I in for! This guy is an escaped con! He must have picked me up for a cover, three people instead of two. He'll probably plug me when this is over. Why didn't I say Lordsburg instead of Amarillo?

They were soon out of Lordsburg and picking up speed. In a short span the car had settled into the 72-mile-an-hour groove. The woman was sitting half turned, her back to the door and her face toward the driver. Her left arm stretched along the top of the front seat and her fingers drummed in rhythm with the music.

Suddenly she straightened and reached with both hands into her purse. She held a small mirror in her left hand while she adjusted her hair and applied lipstick with the right. After blotting her lipstick with a tissue, she returned the articles to her purse, fumbling for a few seconds before resuming her half-turned position. This time her left hand was clenched in a fist.

Gradually her arm swung down in an arc across the back of the seat until her small fist was below any possible view of the driver. Suddenly the old man was startled by a sharp rap on his knee. He glanced down and saw the woman's fist poised above his lap. Oh, Lord! he thought. She's been kidnaped and is trying to pass me a note or something! She'll get both of us killed!

The old man was afraid to move, but the small fist was imperative. Carefully he extended a trembling palm until it was directly beneath and barely touching her whitened knuckles. He clenched his fingers around a crumpled piece of paper and thrust it into his pocket without daring to look. Deliberately the woman returned her arm to the top of the seat, without disturbing the driver.

Now thoroughly frightened, the old man was convinced he was the captive of an escaped convict and kidnaper, a man who would shoot at the least provocation. He decided to leap from the car at

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the first opportunity. Surely they would have to slow down in Deming, probably even stop for a light.

However, when they came into the town, the driver exhibited another facet of his skill. The car never slowed below 40 and was accelerated and decelerated at precisely the right rate to make every green light. Back on the road, the speedometer moved up to 72 miles per hour.

Terrified as he was, the hitchhiker forced himself to think. My first plan was no good. If I jump from the car, he'll realize I'm on to him and shoot me down before I've gone three steps. On the other hand, if I make an excuse for leaving and do it in a crowded place, he may believe me and would hesitate to shoot and draw attention to himself.

I've got it! It'll be almost noon by the time we get to Las Cruces. That's a big town and he can't possibly make every light. The first time he stops, I'll say I need a men's room and get out before he can do anything. The girl will think I'm abandoning her, but I'll get to the cops as quick as I can. Risky, but I'll have to chance it.

The flat country had given way to rolling hills now, and the road curved upward. Still the driver did not slacken the pace. He and the girl were silent, one concentrating on his driving and the other apparently listening to the country and western music.

On they went. The traffic was getting heavier. The road changed, first to a four-lane highway, then to a divided freeway. The old man sat up. They were approaching Las Cruces. A warning sign: Freeway Ends 1 Mile Ahead. Now they were on city streets.

Then the big chance, a red light at a busy intersection. The old man leaned forward, mumbling, "I think I'll find a men's room," and he opened the car door. His feet hit the pavement and he slammed the door behind him.

He wanted desperately to run, but he forced himself to walk, expecting at any moment the crashing impact of a bullet between his shoulder blades. By the time he'd crossed the sidewalk, he was sopping wet with perspiration and his legs trembled uncontrollably.

He passed in front of a display window and lurched into a store entry, exhaling a sob of pure relief. Safely inside, he dug into his pocket and withdrew the crumpled piece of paper—a worn five-dollar bill.

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 459th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . crooks versus cops—the eternal vendetta. . .*

*The author, Patricia L. Schulze, is in her middle thirties, "predominantly occupied with being the wife of a college chemistry professor and the mother of two sons and two daughters." She claims no "true hobbies," but passes her "abundant free time" reading "seven books a week, mostly mysteries," tent-camping with her family three months each summer, and writing. She admits to having been a "daydreamer" most of her life, and now, while she makes the beds, washes the dishes, vacuums and irons ("abundant free time"!), she "thinks up plots and bits of dialogue which she jots down, and connects and polishes in the afternoons."*

*We are happy to add another, and promising, Patricia to our roster of Patricias (notably Highsmith and McGerr) . . .*

# THE LAST PROWL

### by PATRICIA L. SCHULZE

Larry put down the paper he had been reading and stared thoughtfully into space, bobbing his foot to the rhythm of the country music coming from a battered radio on the table under the window. He nodded as a slow smile twisted his lips. "We're going to kill us a cop."

Sid turned from the sink where he was shaving and looked through the doorway of the bathroom into the shabby motel bedroom where Larry was lying. "What in hell are you talking about?"

"Just what I said. We're going to kill us a cop, pick up the grass, and get out of this two-bit dump before the rest of this town's amateur police force get organized enough to remember us."

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"Oh, sure," sneered Sid, swishing his razor under the running faucet. "We kill Jenner and the other two cops will be at this door before his body is even cold!"

Sergeant Ed Jenner had been giving them a lot of trouble this time. The 26-year-old boy wonder of the Turkey Ridge, New Mexico, police force had been away at college the last two times Larry and Sid had used the abandoned farm on the other side of the ridge as a pickup point for marijuana flown in from Mexico.

Those two times it had been simple. Check into the motel two days ahead of time, just two truck drivers on a layover, then out to the meeting at the farm with the boys from Juarez, hand over the money, pick up the grass, then the run back to San Francisco. No witnesses, no curious police, no hassle.

That was when the Turkey Ridge police force had consisted of one old geezer about ready for retirement and a near-sighted traffic-ticket writer whose idea of big crime was going 45 miles an hour in a 30 m.p.h. zone.

But this time they had to cope with Jenner, fresh from college with a degree in law enforcement and suspicious of everyone he hadn't known since he was ten years old.

Going into the motel office that morning to pick up a copy of the local paper, the hotel manager had jibed at Larry, "What's with you guys? You big-time hoods or something? That new cop we've got here was in this morning, looking at my register and asking all kinds of questions about you fellows."

"What kind of questions?" asked Sid.

"Oh, you know. How long you've been here? If you were ever here before? How long did you stay? I had to tell him you were here a couple of times before. Hope you don't mind?"

Larry put the coins for the paper on the counter and grinned. "Nope, don't mind. We're clean."

"Well, if you were planning any fooling around on your wives I'd cool it." The manager laughed. "He was sitting across the street in his patrol car watching your truck all night."

"Hell, just what we need!" Larry slammed the paper on the bed when they got back to their room.

"You think he knows anything?" Sid asked.

"Hell, no. He's just a new boy trying to show off for the hometown crowd, but he can sure mess up our deal if he keeps hanging around. We have to meet the boys at eight tomorrow night, and I don't think they would appreciate it if we showed up

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with a cop on our tail. We've got to get rid of him some way."

Then he sat down on the bed to read the paper and Sid went into the bathroom to shave.

"Not Jenner, you fool. Old man Martin." Larry picked up the paper.

"Who's Martin?" Sid lounged in the doorway, extracting a crumpled pack of cigarettes from his pocket.

"The old police chief. He's retiring tomorrow. Here." He shoved the paper across the bed. "Read it yourself."

Sid picked up the paper and read:

> CELEBRATION PLANNED SUNDAY FOR CHIEF MARTIN
>
> Police Chief Ray Martin is retiring tomorrow after 35 years on the Turkey Ridge police force. A midday picnic is planned to mark the occasion, with a fireworks display in the evening.
>
> At 5:30 Sunday afternoon, Chief Martin will make one last commemorative patrol of the southeast section of town, from Elm to Almond Streets. This was Chief Martin's first patrol when he joined the Turkey Ridge police force 35 years ago.

Sid tossed the newspaper aside. "All right. I read it. What's it have to do with us and why should we kill this Martin?"

Larry shook his head in annoyance. "Martin hasn't got anything to do with us. That's why we're going to kill him."

"I think you must be cracking up," said Sid.

"Look. We've got to get Jenner off of our backs for tomorrow night, right? The only other cop in this town is too dumb to figure anything out, so if Martin is killed Jenner will have to take over the investigation. We've got no connection with Martin. We would never be suspected of killing him, and the investigation will keep Jenner so busy that, by the time he remembers us, we will have made the pickup and be out of here."

"Yeah, you've got a point there, Larry. But how are we going to get away from Jenner to do it? You heard that manager. Jenner is sitting on our tail."

"Tomorrow, during the picnic. You've seen all the activity in this burg. A party like that has to be the high point of the year. You can bet Jenner won't pass that up. We'll leave the truck here and walk down to the section where Martin is going on his last patrol. We'll find a good spot and wait. If Jenner should come by

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here, he'll see the truck and think we're still in the motel. We've still got the 'scope on that rifle out in the truck, haven't we?"

"Yeah, it's under the seat."

Larry and Sid waited until half-past two the next day, just to be on the safe side. Then they walked to the front of the motel and up and down the block a couple of times just to make sure there was no sign of Jenner.

"See, I told you." Larry said. "If that cop had been staking out Al Capone, he'd have taken the afternoon off to go to the picnic."

Sid took a look in the motel office and called out a few times, but there was no answer from the manager. "All clear," he called back to Larry. "Looks like our friend has gone downtown too. Get the rifle out of the truck."

The rifle was wrapped in a shapeless canvas bag. With Larry carrying it, the two men walked the seven blocks south to Elm Street and then followed the patrol route three blocks farther. There, at the midway point in the route, they found what they were looking for, a condemned building with the words "Ortega Flowers" faintly visible on the plate-glass window. The window was cracked and whole sections of the glass had been broken out. The front door, which at one time had been boarded up, had fallen victim to the vandalism of neighborhood children and hung on its hinges, allowing easy access to the building.

Inside was the main showroom with sagging shelves and two disconnected cooler cabinets. At the back of the room a doorway, minus its door, led into a smaller storeroom which, from the arrangement of the shelves and tables, must have been used for the cutting and arranging of the flowers. A rickety staircase led up to the second story and another door opened onto the back alley.

Larry went out into the alley and looked around. "This is good. All that overlooks this alley are a few empty stores and there is a side alley halfway down leading into the next block. With all the excitement out front, no one will notice us if we leave this way. Let's see what we have upstairs."

The upstairs had been fixed up as an apartment for the owner, one room obviously a kitchen with all the appliances removed and the sink torn away from the wall. There was a closet-sized bathroom at the end of the hall. Sid went into the largest room at the front of the building and called out, "I think this is what we want, Larry. There's a broken window here with a good view of the

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street." He laughed. "Even a couple of nice chairs so we can wait in comfort."

Larry followed him into the room and shook his head at Sid's chairs. The neighborhood kids had been busy up here too and had gutted the chairs, stretching the coil springs as straight as possible and scattering them about the room. He went over to the window and looked out. "Couldn't have been better if we'd planned it for weeks," he said. "Everybody in town must be down at that corny picnic."

They settled themselves on the floor by the window. Sid pulled a couple of cans of beer out of the bag holding the gun. "Could get to be a hot wait," he said, snapping one can open and handing the other can to Larry.

Larry leaned against the wall and played with his beer can. After a while the waiting got to Sid. He prowled around the apartment, poking into closets and fiddling with the sink. Finally he went back down the stairs and walked along the alley to check their escape route. He looked up, startled, when Larry whispered to him through an upstairs window. "Sid, get back up here. It's a quarter after five."

Sid ran up the stairs and knelt at the window, the rifle barrel just peeking over the edge of the sill as he sighted along the street. "That's funny," he said, "I thought the streets would be full of people by now, gathering to watch the last ride of the town hero."

"Oh, they're probably walking the route with him. They'll be here when he gets here," Larry said.

The minutes crawled past. Sid wiped his hands on his jeans to get rid of the sweat that was making his fingers stick to the gun. "Damn! Where is he? What time is it, Larry? Shouldn't he be here by now?"

Larry looked at his watch, a frown wrinkling his forehead. "Should be. It's twenty to six."

Sid looked up the street, puzzled. "Still no people. You don't suppose they decided to call off the whole thing?"

"No. Look." Larry pointed down the street. There, in clear view just a block away, was the patrol car, its red light slowly revolving as the car crawled along. "Here he comes. Moving at that speed he's an easy target. Just take it easy, Sid."

Sid raised the rifle to his shoulder and sighted through the 'scope as the patrol car drew abreast of the building. Then, at

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what seemed to Larry to be the last possible moment, Sid gently squeezed the trigger. They watched in fascination as the driver of the car jerked sideways across the seat. The car then wandered across the street and gently nosed to a stop against a lamp post.

They watched for a couple of minutes more, but there was no movement from the front seat of the police car and, strangely, no frenzy of activity in the street. Then they wrapped up the rifle and went downstairs. They looked around carefully before starting up the alley, but there was still no one in sight and no sound out front. They went casually down the side alley and into the next street.

The streets were still deserted as they walked back to the motel. "You'd almost think they were clearing the way for us," Larry chuckled as they neared their room.

"All the same it makes me nervous," said Sid. "Let's pack up and get out of here. We can wait out at the farm as well as here and then we'll be out of the way if anyone comes nosing around." He stashed the rifle back under the seat of the truck.

A quick check of the office showed that the manager hadn't returned. They went back to their room and quickly threw their things together. A few minutes later they were ready to leave and went back to the office to pay their bill.

The manager was behind his counter when they entered the office.

"Thought we'd like to check out now," Larry said casually. "We looked in a few minutes ago, but there wasn't anybody here. Guess you must have been down at the big celebration I read about in the paper."

The manager looked up uneasily. "Yeah, I just got back. Wasn't much of a celebration though." He looked at the two men nervously. "I just came from the hospital. Old Ray Martin is still in critical condition."

Larry looked surprised. "Critical condition? What happened?"

"Thought maybe you boys had heard about it, seeing as how you were in your room all afternoon. It's been on all the radio news. Some damn drunk ran a stop sign and hit old Ray broadside just as he was starting on his patrol. He's in bad shape and, wouldn't you know it, the fool drunk got off without a scratch."

Sid looked startled. "You mean he never got to make his patrol?"

The manager turned and fumbled their keys onto a hook on the

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rack. "Nope. He never made it. Turned out to be a damn good thing for him though. Jenner was shot this afternoon on that same route."

"Jenner!" Sid looked quickly at Larry. "What was he doing on that route?"

"Guess strangers like you wouldn't know. That's Jenner's route now. Always goes to the newest guy on the force.

"They've called in the State Police to help find the killer. Figured at first that it was someone with an old grudge, out to get Ray, but that didn't pan out. The state cops think that Jenner was the target all right."

The manager gave a high-pitched laugh. "It appears that our friend Jenner wasn't just a regular new guy on the force after all. Looks like he was sent in by the government as an undercover cop—an expert on narcotics traffic is what they're saying around town. It seems he was onto some ring that's been flying drugs in from Mexico and using the old Gomez farm as a pickup point."

The manager dropped some of the change he was counting out for Larry. "They seem to think they won't have any trouble finding the guys. Jenner had it all written down. The government men were to meet him to make the arrests tonight. He even gave them the names of the guys making the pickup from this end."

The manager looked up in relief at the dying wail of the siren as a police car pulled up in front and armed men came piling out.

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*For a change of reading pace, a touch of Grand Guignol. . .*

# RED-CIRCLE DAY

**by VIRGINIA HART**

"You haven't got any eyebrows," he told Irma at dinner.

"That's because I'm blonde. They're pale so they don't show."

"You could use mascara."

"I'm not good with stuff like that." She cornered her last chunk of sausage against a piece of bread and speared it with a fork. "It gets under my eyes and I look like a vampire."

"Then let me put it on for you," he offered, leaping from his chair. He'd been aching to get his hands on her face—to rub cream on it, sprinkle it with powder, transform it into one of radiant, flawless beauty.

"Now stop that, Eugene honey," she said, drawing back. "If you're finished eating, let me take your plate. You don't want to be late for your silly meeting."

Eugene didn't press her. Arguments only gave rise to negative thinking and there was no time for that now. He lifted the next-to-last page of the wall calendar on his way upstairs and let it fall in back of the other used-up months, resisting the impulse to let his eyes rest on the red-circled date.

Was it possible that nearly half a year had passed since that first meeting?

"Six months from today." The speaker's voice had electrically charged every cubic inch of the auditorium that night. "Mark it in red on your calendars. Study the tested techniques outlined in your booklets, step by step. Apply them diligently, and you cannot fail. When your red-letter day arrives, I guarantee you will look into your mirror at the reflection of a successful man."

Eugene had marked the calendar as he'd been told. He'd bought every booklet the company offered and had studied them nights instead of watching TV—even the nights when his favorite programs were on. It was worth the sacrifice. He knew how vital it

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was to learn everything possible about his product and its presentation.

When his first week of ten-hours-a-day selling netted him only two orders for a hand lotion that was on special and one order for a bottle of bubble bath, he didn't feel discouraged. Hadn't a dozen everyday people like himself sprung up on the platform at the meeting, exploding with stories of newly acquired boats and mobile homes? There could be no faking the sparkle of success in those faces. Eugene felt giddy with the possibilities that such success could bring into his own life.

"I love you like a son, Eugene," Irma's mother had said the day they'd announced their intention to marry. But her face had been the face of a mother told her child has an incurable illness. "It's only that I wanted more for Irma—so much more."

Now he pictured himself driving to his in-laws' house in a long white Lincoln. "Folks," he imagined himself saying, "could you keep an eye on the beach cottage for the next month or so? Irma and I feel an irresistible urge to spend April in Paris."

He realized that selling wasn't right for some. You had to love people to make it work—and Eugene did. To have a job where you could be your own boss, where you could choose your own hours, where your only limitations were in the scope of your imagination—could heaven offer more?

No, the fault wasn't with the system. It had to be that he was doing something wrong. But what? No one could have tried harder. How many, after all, would have given up a good paying job with twelve years of seniority just so the fires of ambition could burn freely?

How many would have converted a second bedroom into an office, or bought a desk, a file cabinet, and a typewriter to handle possible correspondence arriving out of a new business venture—no, out of a new life?

How many would build wall-to-ceiling shelves and use their savings to purchase hundreds of dollars' worth of products to stock those shelves? Wasn't that confidence?

He pictured the lady of the house saying, "I love your lotions and creams but I never buy door-to-door because I don't like waiting weeks to get my order."

And he would counter with, "Dear lady, I carry a complete line and can have everything for you in the morning."

It was a selling point he would emphasize when he was asked

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to make a speech on his own climb up the ladder. Think big, they'd told him. And he had. Never consider failure. And he hadn't.

Irma made a face like a dead goldfish when he squeezed through the front door carrying cardboard boxes of lotions and creams.

"More cosmetics? Nobody's buying what you already have and I'll never live long enough to use it all. I don't even wear much makeup."

"But you should, baby," he'd told her. "If you'd read some of these pamphlets and go to a couple of meetings with me, you'd be as enthusiastic as I am. We could work as a team—"

"You mean—me—go door to door?" She looked as if he'd asked her to dance naked on the lawn. "I'd die."

"We wouldn't want that," he managed, patting her cheek. "What about cosmetic parties? You could sell without ever leaving the house."

"Sell to who, Eugene? Mother? My sister? I don't have many friends but I'd have fewer if I invited them over just to sell them your stuff."

But determined not to let the vibrations of negativism touch him, Eugene would quickly abandon such conversations and reach instead for one of the sales booklets that were fanned out by the dozen on the coffee table. He'd smile as he read one of his favorites, such as "How To Handle Objections Before They Become Objections," and he'd jot down notes.

Irma kept her job at the bakery and never complained that Eugene wasn't bringing in any money. It was only when her mother came for her Wednesday visits that whispers of ill will, cut short whenever he came into the room, filled the air.

"A real job like other men," and "A man selling lipsticks, it's unnatural."

He tried not to let it ruffle him—even when his mother-in-law dumped the contents of her purse on the table to search for her car keys and his eyes fell on it—a lipstick of a competitive brand!

"What's wrong with the sample shades I give her?" Eugene wanted to know.

"She's just always worn that particular shade, honey. Don't take it personal," Irma said, defending her mother's insult.

But he did. How could he help it? It wasn't only at home—forces everywhere were trying to get him down. People wouldn't

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answer their bells, even when he'd seen the curtains moving and knew they were home. He'd think the corners of his mouth up into a pleasant smile as he retreated. Well, it was their loss, wasn't it? His was a superior product and they hadn't given it a chance. Let their faces sag and their lips parch.

Over the months he'd had doors slammed in his face. He'd been threatened and insulted. He'd had sprinklers directed at him. Dogs had even been turned loose on him.

When a speaker at a sales meeting stressed the importance of appearance, Eugene had his hair styled. He put an extra shine on his shoes and parked his six-year-old car around the corner because it didn't exactly mirror success. Then he bought a handsome wicker basket to carry his samples in and a length of bright blue ribbon for Irma to tie onto the handle in a cheery bow.

Nights were as hard as days. His feet were so swollen from walking that they throbbed. The corners of his mouth ached from being forced into their ten-hour smiles. When he did fall asleep there'd be the nightmares—Eugene before a judge and jury being sentenced to death, his sample case marked as evidence of his crime.

He'd always smiled at the little salesman in the Blondie and Dagwood comics. The little man would stick his foot in the door so the customers couldn't close it on him or he'd climb in an upstairs window so that he could catch Dagwood in the bathtub. The little salesman wasn't funny to him any more. He was a tragic figure.

Now there were only three days left. He'd promised Irma that if he wasn't successful by the date marked in red on their calendar, he'd give it up and get a regular job. Six months ago failure had seemed impossible.

That night Eugene was too pressed for time to merely sit and absorb the radiance of the speakers on the platform. They possessed the secret that could save him. The man he cornered at the coffee machine had surely never been chased by dogs.

"You don't ask a woman. You tell her." The man moved from side to side, up and down as he spoke, as if he felt the need to be a moving target. "Tell her you'll do a free makeup on her and you'll even throw in a product of her choice just for the opportunity to bring out her natural beauty."

"But if she doesn't listen?"

"Tell her she looks like Elizabeth Taylor. She'll listen. Tell her you noticed it right away, and that with only a few cosmetic

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touches you can fix her so that everybody notices the resemblance. When her husband comes home and sees how great she looks"—he snapped his fingers—"you've got a customer for life."

"But what if she looks nothing like Elizabeth Taylor?"

"Then Cher, or Julie Christie or Faye Dunaway."

"But—"

"No buts. Tell her."

It sounded simple. But how could he practise? Irma wouldn't let him work on her. He ended up locking himself in the bathroom and applying the makeup to his own face. It wasn't easy to get a decent arch to the brows since his own were so dark and shaggy, but it would have to do.

He'd spent so many hours poring over company makeup charts that he knew all about which shade of foundation and powder best suited each woman's particular coloring and which eyeshadow or liner would be most flattering. He knew how to apply blusher to play up the facial structure. All he lacked were willing faces on which he could apply his knowledge.

The first three houses of the morning were no-answers.

He told the next woman she looked like Julie Andrews and she screamed at him, "Liar!"

The next prospect came closest to Barbra Streisand and he told her so. She slammed the door in his face. One woman laughed when he told her she looked like Elizabeth Taylor and she continued laughing, louder and louder, as he made his retreat.

He sat under a tree on a grassy park-like strip and ate his liverwurst sandwich.

"Don't throw your trash on the grass," a gray uniformed man called to him from a faded green truck. "This belongs to the Department of Water and Power."

"I won't," Eugene assured him. Hurriedly he crumpled what remained of his sandwich into the bag he'd brought it in, and carried it over to the curbside container. Walking back to his car he felt a burning through his cheeks and he knew he was blushing at having been scolded as if he were a child. When he turned around, he noticed that the man was still watching him, a superior smirk on his cruel mouth.

Angry, Eugene glared back. The man looked away. Eugene started over toward the truck, but it pulled away with a screech. And suddenly Eugene knew the secret.

He strode up to the next house and knocked at the door with

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assurance. The woman opened the door a crack and whined that she didn't want any, but Eugene pushed through. She objected when he asked to do a makeup on her, but he countered her objections. She raised her voice and he raised his. In the end he did the makeup. He arched and colored her brows, lengthened her eyelashes, and brought out the shape of her lips. She certainly did look like Audrey Hepburn when he was through. He left his samples and a business card.

In the next house he did a Grace Kelly and in the next a Jane Fonda. He even had two Elizabeth Taylors before he headed home, tired but fulfilled.

Irma met him at the door. No makeup. No mascara. No eyes.

"Let's send out for chicken," he began. "I want to do a complete makeup on you while I'm in my stride."

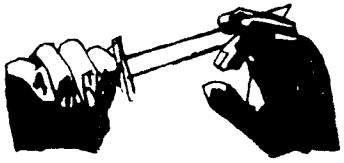
"Not with that again, Eugene," she told him, turning her back. "I'm in the middle of fixing a nice cheese omelet."

"Please," he begged.

She headed for the kitchen and he followed her. "Go away. Take a shower, you'll feel better."

He sighed and reached into his wicker basket for the length of blue ribbon he'd used to strangle the objections out of the other women. It had been only a last resort, of course, and alas, the only way he was able to get them to sit still for a makeup. The unfortunate thing was that they'd never know how truly beautiful they looked.

He closed his eyes for a moment. Irma looked like—yes, Grace Kelly. He'd do an arched brow in a light brown, with coral on the lips. Yes, pale coral. He started toward her.



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# ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

# CRIME DOSSIER

**by OTTO PENZLER**

PAGES: The publisher calls it a magazine in book form (whatever that is) but—whatever it is—the publication of the first edition of *Pages* (Gale Research, $24.00) is a major literary event. In addition to material of non-mystery interest and importance, such as previously unpublished work by Ray Bradbury, James Dickey, and Ring Lardner, there are chapters by the Edgar-winning Joe Gores and William F. Nolan. Perhaps most fascinating are four excellent pieces about the creation of some of the great detectives of this century—written by the creators themselves. Richard Lockridge writes about Mr. and Mrs. North, Maxwell Grant about The Shadow, Brett Halliday about Michael Shayne, and John Ball about Virgil Tibbs. In addition to the high quality of its contents, *Pages* is also a physically handsome book (that is, magazine), its 304 oversized (8½" x 11") pages generously illustrated and printed in two colors.

*OUTRAGES:* They're all here—the people you love to hate. Count Dracula, Svengali, Dorian Gray, Captain Hook, Professor Moriarty, and, of course, the insidious Dr. Fu Manchu are just a few of the loathsome characters featured in *The Great Villains* (Bobbs-Merrill, $8.95). It is easily the best coffee table book of the year for anyone who likes to shudder in fond memory of those thunderstorm nights when icy fingers of terror suddenly clutched the spine and refused to release their grasp. Well conceived and handsomely illustrated, the book's only shortcoming is the rather sparse text, which doesn't tell nearly enough about the nasty figures drawn from juvenile and adult literature.

*SAGES:* Some of the leading experts in the world of mystery fiction have contributed authoritative essays to *The Mystery Story* (Publisher's Inc., 243 12th Street, Del Mar, Calif. 92014; $10.95). Among the 17 chapters of criticism, appreciation, and history of every type of detective, crime, espionage, and suspense fiction are "The Police Procedural" by



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Hillary Waugh, "The Private Eye" by James Sandoe, "Cultural Relevance" by Aaron Marc Stein, "The Ethnic Detectives" by John Ball, "The Spy in Fact and Fiction" by Michael Gilbert, and much more—by Robert E. Briney, Ned Guymon, Allen J. Hubin, Francis M. Nevins, Jr., Otto Penzler, Michele Slung, Phyllis A. Whitney, and Donald A. Yates. There is something for everyone, and none of it has been published before.

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# BLOODY VISIONS

**by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER**

Our favorite genre, the mystery, is being packaged in new visual and audio guises. Here are two experiments that work:

Last year young Byron Preiss began his *Fiction Illustrated* series of visual novels for Pyramid Publications (757 Third Avenue, N.Y.C. 10017) with his own parody creation, the three-foot-high private eye, Schlomo Raven. Now, more seriously, he has produced an extraordinary homage to the hard-boiled school, *Chandler* ($4.95), a groundbreaking mix of words, pictures, and graphic design written and illustrated by the dynamic artist / storyteller, Jim Steranko. Each page, equally divided between text and zap art, is like the ticking of a clock as it advances the investigations of detective Frank Chandler—who has 72 hours to trap or be trapped by a multiple murderer. The settings, shabby Broadway backstreets in a nightmare 1940s (neither Steranko nor Preiss is old enough to remember firsthand much of the decade), are well caught. Says Preiss: "The graphic-novel medium has as much potential for the mystery as have the traditional forms." Joe Gores contributes an enthusiastic introduction ("You hold an instant classic in your hands."). The book *is* good, and makes one eager for the next *Fiction Illustrated* project: a contemporary crime probed by the son of Sherlock Holmes, who in Preiss's vision is *not* a carbon of his famous father.

*"He asks me to kill people for him. Enoch. The thing that lives on the top of my head . . ."* The voice belongs to Robert Bloch, with all the gravity of a superb fireside yarn-spinner. Two delightfully frightening Bloch tales, read by the author, can be heard on the album, *Gravely, Robert Bloch,* just pressed by Roy Torgesun's Alternate World Recordings (148 East 74 Street, N.Y.C. 10021, $6.95). Torgesun also has produced an album by science-



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fiction writer, Harlan Ellison, featuring his psychological horror story, *Shatterday,* and plans a double package combining Bloch and Ellison for *The Life and Future Times of Jack the Ripper,* and disks by other mystery writers as well. Torgesun feels he is continuing the age-old oral traditions of narrative; that the recordings personalize and preserve the author's words. "In reading his own stories the author brings his own interpretation to his works." It's nice to know, too, that mystery writers will be found in the spoken-word archives of the future.

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# INTERVIEW: PHYLLIS A. WHITNEY

Without argument, Phyllis A. Whitney is the most popular writer of gothic novels in the United States. Her most recent best-seller, *Spindthrift,* has been purchased for a major television production.

EQMM: Would you describe yourself as a writer who writes for women?

WHITNEY: Yes. I get lots of fan mail from men, but mainly I write for women.

EQMM: Does it bother you or please you to know that you've been pigeonholed as a writer for one sex?

WHITNEY: It pleases me very much. I'm a girl; I like to write for girls.

EQMM: You write only gothic novels . . .

WHITNEY: I prefer to call them romantic suspense novels. But gothic is a term that has been pinned on them, and that's all right.

EQMM: What would you say are the basic elements of a gothic, or a romantic suspense novel?

WHITNEY: The ancestors, of course, are such books as *Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights* and *Rebecca.* You always have a heroine in peril, and a handsome hero, such as Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre.* You must have an old house, of course, for your gothic architecture. You need a mystery, of course, and plenty of danger.

EQMM: Do you think it is more difficult to write a single type of genre fiction, as you do, or to have a broader range of subjects from which to choose?

WHITNEY: It is probably more difficult to stick to one type because I find I use up material. For instance, my heroine must always be faced with a problem. I have used up an awful lot of problems! I have to keep thinking up new problems and I'm sometimes afraid I'll run out. There are certain restrictions, but within these limitations there is a lot of variety possible. So I manage.

EQMM: Do you base any of your characters on real-life



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people?

WHITNEY: Never. I think a fiction writer is someone who likes to make up stories and people. Real people would get in my way. They wouldn't do what I want them to do. Some writers use them; I can't.

# THE JURY BOX

**by JON L. BREEN**

For proof, if proof be needed, of the incredible variety of books falling under the wide crime story umbrella, consider two new novels, issued within days of each other by the same publisher.

David Morrell's *Testament* (M. Evans, $7.95) is an extraordinary, disturbing, violent novel of outdoor pursuit and survival. Writer Reuben Bourne has provoked the enmity of a paramilitary leader, who does not flinch from getting at Bourne through his family. The almost unbearable emotional impact of the early chapters mercifully lets up in the middle stages, only to return with a vengeance at the end. Creating the kind of horror and revulsion a truly violent novel morally must, this is an outstanding work of fiction, though never a pleasant one. (****)

After the downer of Morrell, there could be no more welcome upper than Donald E. Westlake's latest comic novel, *Dancing Aztecs* (M. Evans, $8.95), in which a large cast searches New York for the *real* (and priceless) statue of an Aztec god among a shipment of reproductions. Westlake, whose success as a humorist stems from his apparent affection for all his characters, however venal they may be, throws in parodies of corporation annual reports, contracts, and *Our Town;* uses coincidence as artfully as Harry Stephen Keeler; and fairly drops the clues in a mystery of who'll-get-it rather than whodunit. The witty dust jacket by Joel Schick sums up the novel's appeal admirably. (****)

Tim Heald: *Let Sleeping Dogs Die,* Stein and Day, $6.95. The British Board of Trade's cynical, sometimes inept Simon Bognor looks into the murder of a prize poodle and an international dog-smuggling ring. The plot is like a Dick Francis, only with dogs, and the climax is satirically Bondean.

Margaret Millar: *Ask for Me Tomorrow,* Random House, $6.95. Chicano lawyer Thomas Aragon goes to Mexico to search for his client's first husband, finds other people's dead bodies instead. Good writing, funny dialogue, and a surprise solution from one of the field's most admired pros.

David Axton: *Prison of Ice,* Lippincott, $8.95. How will the Arctic scientific team escape



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from an adrift hunk of ice scheduled to blow to bits at midnight, and who is the homicidal maniac in their midst? A real nail-biter, perfect for the movies. Affirmative action has been observed in the selection of strandees.

Meg Elizabeth Atkins: *Samain,* Harper & Row, $7.95. English cop Harry Beaumont inherits a house from an aunt reputed to be a witch and becomes involved with the strange household of a reclusive horror-movie director. An occult detective story with a nice sense of the macabre.

Jack Foxx: *Freebooty,* Bobbs-Merrill, $8.95. In the first of a series (I hope), Fergus O'Hara investigates murder and a gold robbery aboard a riverboat out of Civil War San Francisco. Readers may anticipate some of the umpteen surprise twists, but surely no one will see them all coming. (The author is also known as Bill Pronzini.)

Among the recent reprints:

The latest Perry Mason double volume pairs two good ones: *The Case of the Golddigger's Purse* (1945) and *The Case of the Buried Clock* (1943) (Pocket Books, $1.95). They show that Erle Stanley Gardner was one of the most popular mystery writers of his day for good reasons—surely not for style or characterization, but for plot, pace, good detective work, and that fascinating legal lore that the Mason TV series never had time for.

Malcolm Braly's 1963 novel *Shake Him Till He Rattles* (Pocket Books, $1.50) captures the jazz-dope-beat scene of San Francisco with powerful writing and a feeling for people, though the Hollywood ending seems out of place . . . San Francisco in 1928 is the setting for Joe Gores' *Hammett* (Ballantine, $1.95), the remarkable 1975 novel in which an ex-Pinkerton man, who has become better known in another field, essays a return to detective work . . . An American private eye with the Vatican for a client looks into the death of an Italian priest in Robert Rosenblum's *The Good Thief* (Ballantine, $1.75), one of 1974's most distinguished mysteries.

Finally, if the Mystery Writers of America gave an Edgar for blurb writing, a prime candidate would be the anonymous scribe at Pyramid who penned the following for the back cover of their reissue of Sax Rohmer's 1936 opus, *President Fu Manchu* ($1.25): "With his vast army of slaves and zombies infiltrating every facet of American life, the evil doctor had incorporated a new and deadly weapon into his ever expanding arsenal: Political Rhetoric!"

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"Q"



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# REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

**DEATH IS ACADEMIC, by Amanda Mackay. McKay-Washburn, $7.95.**

Attractive, red-haired Hannah Land is a newly arrived member of the political science department at Duke University, eager to become part of the academic community. However, the combination of southern hospitality, professors, and . . . poison causes her to alter her plans and add detection to her list of activities.

"A portrait gallery of suspects, a gem of a setting . . . a very fine first novel indeed."—Dorothy Salisbury Davis

"A delight, not to be put down . . . This puzzle's a refreshingly nonviolent winner." — *Publishers Weekly*

A selection of The Detective Book Club.

**THE GREAT VILLAINS, by Janet Pate. Bobbs-Merrill, $8.95.**

A great assemblage of the most infamous villains of literature, stage and screen—brilliantly analyzed and shown in over 100 evocative photographs, period engravings and drawings—to chill and delight theater fans, history and movie buffs.

Here they are in all their charismatic wickedness: the great Svengali and bloodthirsty Count Dracula, Captain Hook, vengeful Injun Joe, Professor Moriarty, the irresistible Dorian Gray—all the immortal scoundrels from Lady Macbeth to Goldfinger, arch-villain of modern times.

Packed with information, a visual pleasure, highly entertaining—this is a book to read and savor and return to again and again.

**MAGICIANS OF MYSTERY, edited by Ellery Queen. The Dial Press, $8.95.**

Ellery Queen's *Magicians of Mystery* is the 32nd in the series of semi-annual anthologies of stories from *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. It sparkles with misdirection, illusion, hocus-pocus, and sleight-of-hand, beginning with Stanley Ellin's dazzling story, "The Moment of Decision." The collection includes stories by such other wizards in the genre as Erle Stanley Gardner, J. J. Marric (John Creasey), Cornell Woolrich, Julian Symons, Phyllis Bentley, Edward D. Hoch, Patricia Highsmith, Lawrence Treat, Michael Gilbert, Joe Gores, Ellery Queen—and ending, appropriately enough, with a Merlini story by mystery writer and magician, Clayton Rawson.

Anthony Boucher was right. Ellery Queen *is* the American detective story.

**DIE AFTER DARK, by Hugh Pentecost. Dodd, Mead, $6.95.**

Four days before he is scheduled to announce his candidacy for the United States Senate, Andrew Crown finds himself a prime suspect in the murder case of an attractive Long Island divorcee. He had been seen leaving her cottage the night the murder was committed. Can he be cleared in time to begin his campaign? A thrilling new novel by Hugh Pentecost featuring Julian Quist, who, in the words of the *New York Times Book Review* columnist Newgate Callendar, is "the mod, wealthy, brilliant, handsome public relations man who always comes up with the right answer."



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| TITLE NO. | AUTHOR | TITLE | PUBLISHER | RETAIL PRICE | DIS-COUNTED PRICE |
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| 58710 | Atkins, Meg Elizabeth | SAMAIN | Harper & Row | $7.95 | $6.35 |
| 34028 | Axton, David | PRISON OF ICE | Lippincott | 8.95 | 6.95 |
| 34606 | Burgess, Anthony | BEARD'S ROMAN WOMEN | McGraw-Hill | 8.95 | 6.95 |
| 56322 | Cussler, Clive | RAISE THE TITANIC | Viking Press | 8.95 | 6.95 |
| 36052 | Ed. by Ellery Queen | MAGICIANS OF MYSTERY | Dial | 8.95 | 6.95 |
| 59649 | Foxx, Jack | FREEBOOTY | Bobbs-Merrill | 8.95 | 6.95 |
| 36119 | Gerson, Noel | SPECIAL AGENT | Dutton | 7.95 | 6.35 |
| 38713 | Heald, Tim | LET SLEEPING DOGS LIE | Stein & Day | 6.95 | 5.50 |
| 30369 | Hill, Peter | THE HUNTERS | Scribners | 6.95 | 5.50 |
| 37758 | Mackay, Amanda | DEATH IS ACADEMIC | McKay-Washburn | 7.95 | 6.35 |
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| 34214 | Pate, Janet | THE GREAT VILLAINS | Bobbs-Merrill | 8.95 | 6.95 |
| 36572 | Pentecost, Hugh | DIE AFTER DARK | Dodd, Mead | 6.95 | 5.50 |
| 33805 | Trevanian | THE MAIN | Harcourt Brace Jovanovich | 8.95 | 6.95 |

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Act of August 12, 1970: Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code)

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

V.C. Stabile
Vice President and Treasurer



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**a *NEW* Milo Turner story by FRANCIS M. NEVINS, Jr.**

*Milo Turner, con man, returns to the pages of EQMM . . . It is an interesting fact that some of the most famous criminals of fiction ultimately reformed and even became detectives. Melville Davisson Post's Randolph Mason, the first "criminal" lawyer, eventually used his vast legal knowledge to aid, rather than evade, justice. Maurice Leblanc's Arsène Lupin, the most celebrated thief of his time, changed from criminal to criminologist, turning into a full-fledged sleuth. Currently, Edward D. Hoch's Nick Velvet finds it necessary to be a topnotch 'tec in order to succeed as a topnotch thief. So, too, Francis M. Nevins, Jr.'s Milo Turner is now forced to solve a mystery to bring off one of his cheating capers. And it wouldn't surprise us if, more and more, Milo Turner shifts from conning to detecting—while managing, like Nick Velvet, to extract a profit at the end of each scam . . .*

# THE DOGSBODY CASE

**by FRANCIS M. NEVINS, Jr.**

The Oakshade Inn had been touted to me, Milo Turner, professional con man, as the most restful place to stay in Barhaven, and during the first three nights of my visit to that drowsy and affluent community I had no cause to dispute the assessment. Floorboards buffed to high gloss, homey maple furniture, bright chintz curtains, view of lush meadows from my second-floor window, fine classical music from the local university's radio station, breakfasts in the hotel dining room that were a trencherman's delight, and a scam that was progressing fantastically. No con man with a taste for the finer things could have asked for more.

Until that fourth night when the phone jolted me awake.

I sprang bolt upright and groped for the night table. The digital

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clock beside the phone proclaimed the time to be 1:14 A.M. I found the receiver and jammed one end to my ear. "Yes?" I spoke into the mouthpiece, fighting to make the word come out calm.

"Fritz!" replied an all too familiar voice, low and menacing like the growl of a German Shepherd on guard duty. "Get your pants on and wait downstairs for a prowl car to pick you up. You've got four minutes."

For an awful moment I was convinced he'd tumbled to the scam and was arresting me over the phone. Then my brain came into gear and I exchanged a few sentences with my caller, hung up, and dived for the clothes closet. Fully dressed and with my Vandyke brushed, I had all of ten seconds to wait in the dim empty lounge of the Inn until the black-and-white braked in front of the picture window, the domelight whirling bloodily.

The scam had been going velvet-smooth till now. In fact, the only sour note in the orchestration was that Chief Knaup for some private reason kept calling me Fritz. My actual *nom de scam* this time was Horst—to be complete, Professor Doktor Horst Gerstad, formerly criminological consultant to the national police of the Federal Republic of Germany, currently president of Gerstad Security Systems, a corporation which analyzed and improved on existing security arrangements for businesses that were uptight about crime.

Professor Gerstad was one of my favorite identities and one of my most lucrative. The close-cropped military brushcut, the little Vandyke, the accent honed to a fine edge by hours of listening to tapes of Henry Kissinger's press conferences, all added up to the quintessence of a walking Teutonic efficiency machine.

I would present myself at a likely corporate headquarters, speak to its top management, learn its security arrangements, punch a few simple holes in them and offer to lease the corporation my own comprehensive security system, which of course had as much real existence as a hippogriff. If the corporation didn't agree, I could always recoup my losses by selling the information I'd picked up to a potential thief.

I had come to Barhaven to make my pitch at the university, and it was in the office of its president, Herbert J. Stockford, A.B., M.A., D.Ed., that I had chanced to meet Stockford's brother-in-law, the chief of the Barhaven police.

E. W. Knaup preferred to be called Duke—I gathered because the E. stood for Elmer or Ethelbert or something equally un-

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macho. He was a short, tubby, gravel-voiced, genially pushy specimen, and he had a blind spot wide enough to drive a semi through. He was a gun nut. No man or woman who encountered him, however casually, could escape one of his monologues on weaponry. One might glance at the sky and remark that it looked like rain, and Knaup would say, "If you want to see a rain of lead, buddy, try the VC-70 Heckler and Koch automatic pistol. Nineteen shots, double action, comes with a stock you can use for a holster *and* which you can attach to the pistol and turn it into a submachine gun. Brip brip *brip*, brip brip *brip*! Love those three-shot bursts."

The chief's personal police cruiser sported a rear-window sticker attesting to his life membership in the National Rifle Association, three separate anti-gun control stickers, a God Bless America tag, a Support Your Local Police tag, and a flag decal. No ambiguity about ol' Duke's sympathies.

After that first meeting in Stockford's office I hadn't expected to see Knaup again, but the very next day, a little before noon, while I was in a conference room on the third floor of the university administration building, poring learnedly over security plans with the chief and deputy chief of the school force, he came striding into the room in full uniform, the polished butt of his Colt Python protruding from his buttoned-down leather holster.

"Fritz!" he barked, like an actor trying out for the voice of the Lord in a DeMille movie.

I looked curiously around the room to see if any of the security guards happened to be named Fritz. Nobody even looked up.

"No, *you*, dummy," he growled at me. That was the way he spoke to people he liked. "We're lunching."

"May I point out that my name is not Fritz?" I said in my most unruffled Kissinger tone.

"We in the law enforcement community eat Mex food for lunch. I hope you like tacos, Fritz," he said, and led me out by the elbow.

Over the guacamole salad at Panchito's he explained his sudden interest in me. "Now here's what it is, Fritz." He wolfed down great gobs of guacamole on taco chips between sentences. "As head honcho of the college, my brother-in-law Herbie Stockford is the one who has to decide about this security package of yours." Chomp crunch. "Only he doesn't know enough about security to hit the dirt when a Remington High Standard Model 10 goes off at him, so he's asked me to sort of help him make a decision."

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Crunch chomp. "Those retired village constables he uses for campus security aren't much better than Herbie, so he's relying on the only pro in town." Crunch crunch. "Me." Burp.

So I repeated my well-rehearsed pitch to the Duke, being careful to throw in as many gun references as I dared. And before we had demolished our quesodillas he had unsubtly switched the subject to weaponry. "What kind of contacts you got in Charter Arms, or Ruger, or Dan Wesson? I've got a little proposition for you."

When I modestly lied that my connections with several of the firms he'd mentioned were at moderately high levels of management, his eyes brightened. "We in the law enforcement community appreciate the work of the arms manufacturers," he said. "And now that we're getting a lot of federal money from LEAA, we'd like to show our appreciation by placing some big orders. Like maybe a gross of M-16 or Armalite 180 rifles, a few dozen folding stock shotguns, all the Glaser Safety Slugs we can lay our mitts on. Say, if I get some of the chiefs in the neighboring towns to come in with me on a shopping list, you think you can get us, say, a thirty percent discount on a $200,000 order?"

He wasn't so crude as to make it explicit that his recommendation to his brother-in-law depended on my help in fixing him up with an arsenal, but I got the message loud and clear and assured him of my fullest cooperation. And that was how things stood between me and the gun-loving chief when, thirty-six hours later, the black-and-white whisked me through the sleeping streets of Barhaven to I knew not what destination.

We skirted the edge of the university grounds and swung north into the low foothills which sheltered the $100,000 homes. The black-and-white made a sharp turn into a private lane and then into the driveway of a fieldstone and redwood showplace halfway up the slope. Half of the house's windows were lit, and floodlights blazed across the broad lawn.

Duke Knaup strode tubbily into the path of the black-and-white and thrust out his palm like a crossing guard. The cop behind the wheel slammed the brakes and I emerged from the rear with what dignity I could muster. Behind the chief shuffled a slim balding man in silk dressing gown and slippers whom I recognized as none other than President Stockford of Barhaven University. His face looked ghastly, as if his best friend had turned into a cheese Danish before his eyes. Without a word they led me

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across 50 yards of grass still wet from the early evening storm to the foot of a stately old elm. The body of a large reddish-yellow dog lay beside the trunk.

"Someone poisoned the poor mutt," Knaup muttered. "Can't tell what was used—lab will give me a report in the morning. About an hour ago Herbie heard the dog whining and came out to investigate and found him lying here. Looks like he'd crawled under the tree to die."

A short dumpy woman in a blue wrapper trotted out of the house to join us. "My sister, Mrs. Stockford. This is Dr. Fritz Gerstad, a visiting criminologist," Knaup introduced us.

"Oh, are you going to help my brother find the—the animal who did this to Thor?" she demanded as we shook hands.

"It is possible I can be of assistance?" I murmured, wondering what the hell I was doing here and how best to stay in character.

"Tell Fritz what you told me about the dog's routine after dark," Knaup directed his brother-in-law.

"He was a trained guard dog," Stockford replied dully. "We let him out every night at sundown and he'd roam the grounds. We haven't had a burglary here since we got him three years ago."

"And have you had a burglary tonight?" I asked.

"No, nothing," Mrs. Stockford said. "I've just finished checking to see if anything is missing."

"Someone probably threw a poisoned meat patty onto the lawn to get rid of Thor," her husband added, "but he hasn't come back yet to break in."

"He'd probably wait till the wee hours before he came back," Knaup pointed out. "But with all the lights on and cops around the house, he won't show now. I'll assign a car to stand by the rest of the night just in case."

"Do I assume correctly, sir, that neither you nor Mrs. Stockford observed any strange automobiles on the private road this evening?"

"The storm was quite heavy up here for a while," the shaken president replied. "We couldn't see as far as the road during that period. That was probably when he came by and threw out the poisoned meat."

Chief Knaup clawed at my arm. "Come over here with me, Fritz." He led me across the squishy grass to a rose arbor behind the house. "Want to explain why I sent for you," he whispered. "You see, I don't believe Thor was killed by somebody who was

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out to burglarize the house. I think whoever did it wanted to kill the dog and that was all."

"A crazed dog-poisoner in Barhaven?" I clucked mildly, trying to suggest his theory was ridiculous without actually insulting the man.

"It makes sense if you know the background," Knaup went on. "Thor was trained as a killer, the kind of dog they use for night security in big empty stores. When the college was going through the anti-war riots six years ago, Herbie hired an outfit that trains these dogs to let some of them run loose at night in the administration building and the ROTC building and some other vulnerable spots. A few long-haired kids broke into the ROTC building one night with a can of paint to put peace symbols on the walls. Couple of them got chewed up pretty bad by the dogs. Caused a big stink, the school went on strike for two days, and Herbie had to cancel the contract for the dogs. When the outfit went bust three years ago he bought one of those same dogs for his personal protection."

"Thor was one of the dogs involved in the incident in the ROTC building?"

"That's right. Half Irish wolfhound and half Pyrenean bearhound. Weight about one ten, a shade bigger than a full-grown German Shepherd, and a hell of a lot meaner."

"I'm sure he was an excellent guard dog," I murmured, "but I fail to see why you wish to involve me in the matter." And, like a tyro swimmer who suddenly realizes he's drifted two miles out from the beach, I was becoming distinctly queasy.

"Herbie loved that dog like a son," Knaup explained, "and I owe him a lot of favors, like my job for instance. He wants me to pull out all the stops to nail whoever poisoned Thor. Trouble is, if I give the case any more than routine attention, the papers will stomp all over me about misusing police resources. I can do without that grief."

I knew exactly what he meant, having taken the trouble to read the back issues of the Barhaven newspapers before I had made my appearance. Last year Knaup had come close to being removed from office over a little matter of assigning three patrolmen, while on duty, to paint his house and oil his gun collection. "That's why you're here, Fritz. You're going to be my dogicide squad for a while. Let's see how good a criminologist you really are."

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I do not shy away from new experiences but this one made me fight hard to repress a shudder. Very few con men have found themselves drafted into the police force while on a scam. I was far from enthusiastic but saw no way to extricate myself short of blowing town. I made an instant decision and held out my hand to Knaup gravely. "So be it," I pronounced as we shook. "Although I wish it explicitly understood that my success will guarantee a favorable recommendation by you of my security system."

Duke Knaup stuck thoughtful fingers under his chin. "I don't know if you have a saying for it in sauerkrautland, Fritz, but here in America you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours."

It occurred to me, as the black-and-white sped me back to the Oakshade Inn, that there were two dogsbodies in this case. I was the second. The old English word dogsbody, meaning an insignificant underling, a lackey, fitted my present situation like pantyhose. Even worse, I had become a detective in spite of myself. But I had had enough experience putting myself in the shoes of the authorities to make me believe I could pull the thing off—with a large dose of luck.

It was too late to start on the case tonight, so I decided that tomorrow morning I would visit the college administration building, get the names of the students whom Thor had maimed six years ago, and then try to learn if they or anyone close to them still lived in Barhaven. And if someone in that category happened also to have access to the college chem lab, we might have our poisoner before the next nightfall.

The mellow sunlight of Friday morning was drenching my room when the phone exploded again. The digital clock read 7:12 and I was not yet in any mood to face the day. I made a kind of glunking noise into the mouthpiece.

"Fritz!" Even half awake it did not take me three guesses to identify my caller. "Get your rear end down to the station, *mach schnell*. All hell's broke loose!"

Thirty minutes later I stumbled out of a cab into the city hall and down a marble staircase to the basement, which was the police headquarters. I informed the fat asthmatic desk sergeant that Chief Knaup was expecting me, but before the sergeant could pick up the interoffice phone, a door flew open behind me and there he stood, posing with his hand on his holster for all the

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world like a short pudgy version of Randolph Scott playing marshal of Tombstone.

"Get in here!" he roared, and stalked ahead of me through the detective squad room and into his own office.

"Read this, and that, and this one." He tossed a stack of police reports across his desk at me. "We've been getting calls all night. Some nut's been driving around the county making war on the dog population of the area!"

On a first reading of the reports I almost agreed with the sputtering chief. Our devotee of the spiked hamburger had cut himself a wide swath last night.

Winston, age 5, Boston bull terrier, property of Mr. and Mrs. Horace Burgess of Newcomb Heights, found dead in the service pantry of the Burgess home at 6:00 A.M.

El Toro, French poodle, age 2, owned by Miss Lucretia Runcible of Barhaven, found dead in its basket in the kitchen when Miss Runcible woke up hungry at 3:25 A.M. and went to the refrigerator for some yogurt.

Cincinnatus, mutt, age 7, belonging to Professor Featherstone of the classics department at the college, found dead behind the professor's front door at 1:30 A.M. when the professor returned home from the annual banquet of the Lucullus Club.

Including Thor, a total of seven canines had been transported overnight to that Big Kennel in the Sky, four within the Barhaven city limits and three in outlying communities.

"Has it been confirmed that the cause of death in each case was poison?"

"Only in the first three so far," Knaup told me. "County lab's been working all night on it. The others will prove out the same. This is a pattern, Fritz."

"Perhaps not the pattern you thought," I murmured, and shuffled through the police reports again. "Observe the addresses of the late dogs' masters and mistresses. Five seem to be private homes, but Miss Runcible is 243 Westview, Apartment 18-D, and Mr. Henry Wampler is 4576 North Wood Avenue, Apartment 907. Does this suggest anything to you?"

Before the chief could figure out what to say, his phone buzzed and he made a grab for it. "Knaup," he barked. "Yeah, Sergeant, I . . . *What?* . . . No, no, I'll go out on this one myself." He slammed down the phone and groped for his visored cap. "Let's go, Fritz."

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"Dogsbody Number Eight?" I inquired.

"Catsbody Number One," he snarled. "Our nutcake's started zapping the cat population too!"

Knaup drove us in his own cruiser, the one with all the gun stickers on the bumper. Ten minutes out of town we turned in between a pair of stone pillars and onto another one of those private drives. The cruiser splashed through a mud puddle in a depression of the road, then sped along clean smooth macadam until the drive ended in a parking circle at the side of a huge Victorian stone monstrosity of a mansion.

"Who is the owner of this establishment?" I asked as Knaup rang the symphonic chime beside the front door.

"Used to be Franklin Bagnell, the big steel manufacturer. He died five or six years ago."

"Ah, yes, I remember seeing him on television—when he visited the Federal Republic of Germany, of course." I had almost blown my scam with that careless remark. I did remember seeing old Bagnell several times on TV newscasts, a cadaverous old reactionary who was forever ranting about Communist-inspired legal restraints on the American businessman. When he was upset a muscle in his cheek would twitch—a Bagnell family trait, I remembered having read in the news magazine.

"Ever since the old man died," Knaup continued, "the lawyers have been fighting in court over who owns the house and the money. For all practical purposes the dog owns it, I guess."

Before I could ask him to clarify that last enigmatic remark, the door was inched open and a trim tired-looking young lady in a pink pantsuit inspected us, made a lightning deduction from the chief's uniform that he was fuzz, and threw the door wide. "Hey, Mama!" she bellowed into the depths of the house. "Cops here!"

A gray fiftyish woman descended the oak staircase to meet us in the foyer where she stood under a huge oil portrait of skeletal old Bagnell and threw out her hands to the Duke. "Oh, Chief Knaup, it's *so* good of you to come. It's not many high officials who would come in person when a cat is murdered."

"We in the law enforcement community love cats deeply," Knaup orated. "Oh, this is Dr. Gerstad, the famous criminologist. Fritz, may I present Madge Slocum, the caretaker here, and her daughter Lila. What happened to the cat, honey?"

Her mother answered for her, sniffing back the hint of a tear. "I

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just don't know what happened, Chief Knaup. I put Kikimora's supper out for her at 5:45 yesterday evening the way I always do, and then I whistled for Barnaby to come in from the yard for *his* supper, and around then it started raining, and Lila and I ate at 6:30. We watched TV together and went to bed early and I found poor Kiki when I came down this morning to get her and Barnaby breakfast. She was lying in her little cat box so stiff and still I knew something was wrong with her, so I picked her up and listened for her little heartbeat and she was dead."

"Is Barnaby your husband, madam?" I asked the sorrowing caretaker.

"He gets better care than a lot of husbands I know," Lila answered pertly. "He's the dog that more or less owns the place."

I took a casual stroll the length of the hallway to a parquet-floored conservatory at the back of the house. A riot of potted plants, hanging ferns, and crawling greenery almost suffocated me. I looked out the rear window on broad landscaped terraces stretching for a few hundred yards, dotted with bright flowerbeds. A large gray dog of indeterminate breed was romping in the middle distance, chasing a rabbit or something. Barnaby seemed a hell of a lot more carefree than most rich people of my acquaintance.

"It's the cat we're interested in, remember?" Knaup snaked an arm through the plant life and plucked me out of the conservatory, leading me through a side corridor and a butler's pantry into a barnlike kitchen and over to a wicker basket heaped with fluffy little pillows where the eighth victim lay. Kikimora was a broad-headed white Maltese with a black notch down the middle of her forehead.

"The cat was merely a personal pet of Mrs. Slocum, I take it?" I asked Knaup. "And the care of the dog is her job, like the care of the house?"

"You got it. Old Bagnell picked up Barnaby about five years before he died. Just a mutt, but the old man grew to love him a lot more than he loved the couple of relatives he had left. So he put most of his money in a fund to care for the dog as long as the dog lived. Honorary trust it's called. Dog's got the run of the house and grounds, eats better than a lot of people, vet comes out to look it over twice a week. The Slocum women's pay, the taxes on the property, everything gets paid out of the trust as long as Barnaby's alive."

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"And when he dies?" I murmured.

"The property and money get divided among seven or eight charities and those two relatives. Second or third cousins, I think. Morton Godfrey, a lawyer in California, and a young kid named George Bagnell. They're the ones who started the lawsuit to knock out the will on the idea the old man was bananas. It's been in the courts for years."

I paced back and forth across the spotless kitchen floor. The extent to which I'd become my own fictitious creation was beginning to frighten me, but with a wild sense of excitement I realized that I might be on the brink of actually solving this case. "But why should the cat have died?" I mumbled half to myself. "Everything else I can account for, but not the cat."

"Fritz, what the hell are you muttering about?"

"Last night you believed that Thor was the intended victim of someone who drove near the Stockford house and threw a poisoned meat patty for him to eat. The rash of dog deaths during the night established that animosity against Thor was not the motive. But you still believed that the killer was a person who spent yesterday evening driving through the area dropping poisoned meat on lawns. This cannot be so. I remind you that at least two of the dogs lived in high-rise apartments. Where do they roam? How does our killer deposit the meat in front of them? You have misconceived the technique of the crimes."

"Now wait a minute, Fritz," Knaup objected, banging on the door of the walk-in meat keeper for emphasis. "Why couldn't the cat over there have picked up something with the poison in it yesterday? It could have been out in the grass playing with Barnaby all evening for all you know."

"We drove through a mud puddle," I reminded the chief, "just inside the private drive leading here. The macadam between that puddle and this house was clean and unmarked until your own car traversed it. You will recall that it rained heavily last evening. No automobile crossed the puddle between its formation and this morning. This is at least circumstantial evidence that there is no madman driving around your community with poisoned meat. Kikimora was poisoned here in this house. And the seven dead dogs were poisoned in their respective homes also."

Something like understanding was beginning to dawn over the chief's dumpy face. "I submit that it was the food their masters served them that was poisoned," I went on. "It is the only

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hypothesis that explains everything. Well, almost everything—everything but the cat. You must call your brother-in-law at the university and ask him where he purchases dog food. Then you must call each of the other owners and ask the same question. I predict you will receive the same answer. Go." I pointed to the phone extension hanging on the kitchen wall next to a memo board. To give orders to a police chief in his own bailiwick tickled my soul.

Knaup pressed touch-tone buttons, got the university switchboard, and asked for President Stockford's office. "Yeah, Herbie, it's Duke. Say listen, Herbie, Fritz here has got a nutty question he wants me to ask you. Where did you buy Thor's chow? . . . Four-footed Gourmet, huh? Okay, Herbie, buzz you later."

He hung up and turned to me. "Herbie fed the dog a special-quality ground chuck he bought at The Fourfooted Gourmet. That's a specialty shop we have in town—finest cuts of meat and other goodies specially prepared for pets. It's where all the pet pamperers go."

"Then that is the place where the poison was mixed with the dog food," I insisted. "Call your office, have your sergeant phone each of the others, and ask them the same question you put to Mr. Stockford, then report back to you. Meanwhile I must deal with the problem of the cat."

Knaup whirled back to the phone while I went through the swing doors in and out of the butler's pantry and down the long hallway into the drawing room where the Slocum women waited. They sat on matching armchairs upholstered in rich blue velvet, talking together in hushed tones.

"Excuse me, ladies." I stepped in front of them and executed a slight bow. "Where do you purchase Barnaby's meals?"

Madge Slocum stared up at me with a look of puzzlement behind her shell-rimmed glasses. "Why, what a strange question! Well, you know Barnaby is not what you'd call an aristocrat among dogs. He was just a stray that Mr. Bagnell found as a puppy and grew extremely attached to. After Mr. Bagnell's death I tried to get Barnaby to eat the finest foods available but he would always turn up his nose, so ever since I've just served him canned dog food I get at the supermarket."

"And where do you obtain the food for your cat?" I continued.

This time Lila Slocum did the honors. "That's a funny story too. Like Mama said, she tried to get Barnaby to eat fancy food.

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There's a special grade of ground chuck she bought for him but he wouldn't eat the stuff. But Kiki went crazy over it, so ever since then we bought the ground chuck for her."

"Every Thursday afternoon I did my weekly shopping for Kiki," her mother added helpfully.

"Did you follow this procedure yesterday as well?" I inquired. Both women indicated that they had.

I didn't need to ask the next question but I asked it anyway. "And the name of the establishment where you procured these culinary delights?"

"It's called The Fourfooted Gourmet," Lila said.

"Thank you." I practically clicked my heels at them Prussian-style, and wheeled back out to the kitchen where Knaup was just hanging up the phone. "Sarge made four of those calls so far. You were right, by damn! They all bought that special ground chuck at The Fourfooted Gourmet."

"As did Mrs. Slocum for her cat," I reported. "The pattern is now clear. Someone poisoned the food at its source. And the rest of a week's supply is sitting in that meat keeper at this moment, and no doubt in the refrigerators of every other bereaved pet owner in this case. Call headquarters and send men out to collect the meat at once. Then let us pay a visit to these canine caterers."

We rocketed back through the mud puddle and roared onto the state highway back to town. Knaup drove with one hand on the wheel and the other on the butt of the Colt Python in its holster. We turned into the main business district in the center of Barhaven and pulled up short in the middle of a tiny parking lot next to a low tan-brick building. "That's the place," Knaup said.

"Is it permitted to park this way?" I asked. Every slot along the sides of the lot seemed to be taken, and he was blocking at least a dozen cars the way he was positioned.

"Man, I'm the law in this town, anything I do is permitted. Let's go."

And casually as two dog owners about to pick up their pets' dinners we stepped into the premises of The Fourfooted Gourmet. A bell over the door tinkled as we walked in. The establishment looked more like a real-estate office than a food store. Pickled-pine paneling, Muzak box bracketed to the wall near the ceiling, imitation brick tile on the floor, an occasional poster of a dog or cat carefully posed to look irresistibly cuddly.

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Behind a gold-flecked formica counter at the far end of the shop there was a long line of refrigerator cabinets. A pale and very thin young man in a white apron, with hair the color of cooked noodles, was weighing meat in a scale for a customer. "What's your pleasure, gentlemen?" he began as he looked at us.

And then he registered Knaup's uniform, and a muscle in his cheek began to twitch. I studied his cadaverous face more closely, compared it with a painted face I had seen this morning, and made one of the rashest statements of my career.

"This is Mr. George Bagnell," I announced, turning to Knaup, "the animal poisoner."

And instantly the place was a madhouse. George flung the package of meat at us, scored a direct hit on Knaup's face, and sprang through a doorway to the rear. Dripping with meat juice, Knaup vaulted the counter and clawed for his gun shouting, "Police, halt!" as he and I ran through the rear storage area and out a side door into the parking lot.

George was gunning a blue Pinto out of the lot and smashed head-on into Knaup's cruiser. He flew out the door of the Pinto and started sprinting toward the street. Knaup snapped a shot at him, aiming low for his leg. He missed George but hit the right front tire of his own cruiser.

George was almost out of the long narrow lot when suddenly a two-tone convertible sped into the area with a fat blonde woman in the front seat and a huge German Shepherd in the rear. The kid had to swerve out of the car's way in a split second. He slammed against the wall as Knaup fired again and the dog leaped out of the car and dived for George as if the kid were a cat.

The fat woman floored her brakes and screeched, "Oh, my God! Down, Schnitzel, down!" and waddled out of the convertible just as Knaup was ramming his Python into the small of George's back and motioning him to assume the frisking position against the wall.

Knaup had to radio for another car to come and haul the prisoner away. While we were waiting for the nearest service station to send someone over to change the flat on Knaup's cruiser, I explained the rest of my conclusions to him.

"As long as Barnaby lived, Bagnell's cousins profited nothing. George Bagnell came to Barhaven for the express purpose of killing the dog. He probably shadowed Mrs. Slocum on her shopping trips, observed her weekly visits to The Fourfooted Gourmet for

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ground chuck, and reasonably but wrongly assumed that the food was for the dog.

"He proceeded to obtain a job at the shop and some poison elsewhere and waited his chance to impregnate a supply of the special ground chuck with the poison just prior to one of Mrs. Slocum's Thursday visits. Altogether a foolish and wasteful plan and one that betrayed its perpetrator's inexperience. Any other dog owner who picked Thursday to shop would find his animal dead too, but I suppose George was not displeased by that. The more dead dogs, the less it would appear that one particular dog was the target.

"And remember that you must arrange for announcements in the newspapers and radio and television that all patrons of The Fourfooted Gourmet must bring their meat in at once for analysis. We want no more dead animals."

"I know it was the twitch that told you the kid was a Bagnell," the chief asked, "but why couldn't he have been Morton Godfrey, the other cousin?"

Actually, of course, he could have been, and I had taken a 50/50 chance, but it wouldn't do to let Knaup know that.

"Being an attorney," I rationalized sagely, "Morton Godfrey would depend on his suit contesting the will, simply because if he should win, the entire Bagnell estate would pass by the law of intestacy, with the charities taking nothing and the two cousins everything. Would he have been so foolish as to try to kill the dog for a small share of the estate when by lawful means he stood to gain so much more? No, it was clearly not a legal mind that conceived these crimes."

"Sharp thinking, Fritz." Knaup clapped me on the shoulder. "And you can bet on it I'll make sure old Herbie signs that contract with your company for security services. Uhhh—provided you put through that little side deal we talked about?"

I looked at the hapless chief, with his uniform dripping meat juice and his tire flattened by his own well-placed slug, and struggled to keep from laughing aloud as I shook his hand again. "We in the criminological community," I assured him, "support a well-armed police force."

"Q"

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*a criminological curiosity. . .*

# THE SHORTEST MYSTERY EVER TOLD

**by REINER F. HORNIG**

Bang!

EDITOR'S NOTE: A one-word mystery: Who fired? Who was shot? Why? When? Where? Surely a mystery on all counts.

Mr. Hornig's clever trick suggests other one-word mysteries. For example:

Guilty!

Again: Who is guilty? Why, when, where?

But while "Guilty!" is also a one-word mystery, it is still longer than Mr. Hornig's—by two letters. Mr. Hornig used only four. How about a three-letter mystery?

You!

J'accuse! Again: Who, why, when, where?

A two-letter mystery? If?

A one-letter mystery? X. X marks the spot. Which spot?

And ultimately, the complete mystery, using *no* letters:

Again: Who, why, when, where—and what?

Dear Reader: Can you take it *further* than that?

"Q"

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**a *NEW* short story by**
**DAVIS GRUBB**

*Another tale of Glory, West Virginia, and another Edgar-Lee-Masters character study that is purely American Gothic. . .*

# BULL PIERSON

***by DAVIS GRUBB***

His hatred for her was so intense that it was close to devotion. It had come full circle and become love again. He would be lost without her, but he knew for many years that—in the end—he would have to murder her. And thereafter be washed-up in the vacuum of her absence.

One comes to cherish hatred in the end. It is a drug, a daily bread, a sustenance for mere existence. He was the very soul of subservience to her, of abject meekness. The meek, it is true, shall inherit the earth. Though the pitfall in this resides in the fact that they shall not keep the world for long. And what is worse, when they emerge from this brief tenure, they shall have lost their meekness as well.

His name, ironically, was Bull Pierson. Bull! Why, he was more of a mooncalf than a hardy fearsome steer. He was the bovine exemplar of uxorious timidity. Uxorious. He cherished that word. He could not remember when he had first heard it, but at the very sound of it he knew it was the sum of himself.

He memorized its definition from the Merriam-Webster dictionary on the little fruitwood lectern in the back of his shop. He was a cabinet maker. He was a tireless, insatiable craftsman. Uxorious. Never a day passed that he did not hear the dictionary's definition in his mind: "Excessively or dotingly fond of, or submissive to, a wife."

Yes, that was Bull Pierson all right. Even, in some crippled sense, to the word "fond." Thirty years of her abuse until he had actually grown fond of it. And despised her all the more for it.

Her name was Hortense. She was six inches taller than he and

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fifty pounds heavier. With sinew, not fat. Her torment of him had become in their married years a fine art. Almost as exacting as his own. Never an overt slur. Always insult by innuendo. Always the insinuation that he was not a man. She could have broken him in half with her two hands, but she preferred to break his manliness in half with her words.

He dreamed incessantly of how he would murder her. From the Glory Public Library he took out books on toxicology and boned up on poisons. Arsenic? No. A metallic salt that left traces for years after in the earth around the coffin. Strychnine? By no means. The symptoms were too evident to any capable coroner. Guns? He was deathly afraid of all firearms. Strangulation? She would have roared with laughter as she seized him by the collar and lugged him up to his room to go to bed without supper.

Among the tools of his trade was a hatchet. Since most of his cabinet work consisted of the most delicate carving, tooling, and inlay, he seldom used so heavy a tool. Yet during the weeks before he came to his decision he honed the blade of that hatchet on his grindstone till he could shave with the edge of the blade. Yes, it would be the hatchet.

Small towns like Glory, West Virginia, are neither kind nor cruel. They are literal. That is why Bull Pierson became a symbol, an emblematic laughing-stock. Wives, in a sudden pique, often got a slap across the face for calling a husband Bull. There was no crueler epithet of emasculation.

He thought of the hatchet for weeks. He wanted to be sure. There must be no hitch. He planned on doing it very suddenly and swiftly. He would come up behind her stealthily, calmly, as she stood with her back to him preparing supper at their big Detroit Jewel range. A single sharp chop of the base of the skull. Then he would telephone Sheriff Clayce Kidder and proudly turn himself in.

He envisioned the grand jury hearing, the trial, the newspaper stories, his picture on television and in the papers. And, inevitably, a total turnabout of the town's concept of him. What? they would exclaim. Bull Pierson has murdered Hortense! We've misjudged him all these years. He has sand in his craw. We have wronged him. He is a man.

The night before the deed was to be done Bull got up from his bed, went to his workshop, and once more tested the edge of the blade with his thumb. It would have severed a two-by-four

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white-pine plank at a single blow. Yet it still did not seem to him sharp enough. Hortense was a sound sleeper or she would have heard the sound of the whirling stone as he lightly held the blade's edge to the wheel, the sparks flying like deathly stars from his thumb. There now, that should do it. He fetched a hair from his head and drew it across the bright blade. The hair was cut in half.

Uxorious. The word haunted him. He opened to the well-thumbed U section of his dictionary. He found another word just ahead of it. Uxoricide. "The murder of a wife by her husband." He went back to his bed contentedly, murmuring this new word softly under his breath.

He was in high spirits the next day. The smell of turpentine, shellac, varnish, and fresh-hewn wood in his workshop was like an elixir of the attar of some black and fragrant rose. On his work bench, wrapped and folded neatly in a swatch of soft upholsterers' cloth, was the hatchet. He picked it up gently, reverently. His mere handling of it caused a fissure to appear in the velour where the blade came whispering through. He smiled and carefully laid it back.

It was shortly past noon. Hortense was at the back of the house. She was on a stepladder restoring into place the few stray fronds of dark-green English ivy which grew on a high trellis against the back wall of the house. She had not lifted a finger to prepare Bull any lunch. She was not hungry. Despite her Brunnehildean proportions she ate little and seldom. As for Bull he could wait for his lunch till she was good and ready.

Bull heard the sound of the fall. But it was not till he had pushed open the screen door and seen for himself that he knew she had, indeed, had the last laugh. She had won again. Her weight had broken the rung of the ladder at the very top and she had fallen and had struck her head against the iron footscraper beside the porch steps. She was dead. A snaking ribbon of crimson streamed and thickened from the deep gash at the back of her head—yes, the very spot where Bull had planned to plant the blade of the hatchet that night.

He laughed. In a kind of drugged and somnolent indifference he wandered back into the house, into the dark cool parlor. He stared at the black lacquered-wicker rocking chair which was Hortense's and Hortense's alone. Bull was never permitted to sit there. He stared at it, smiling, as it took on a new aspect.

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The throne of the proud it had been. Now it was the throne of the meek. For the meek—because of the splintering of a two-foot rung of ladder—had become the inheritor of some small portion of the earth. Boldly he went across the oriental rug and sat in the rocker. He rocked furiously, then slowly. He laughed. He cried a little. He laughed again. Then there came across him the seizure of an ineffable anger at Hortense.

You cheated me! Damn your soul of tarnal hell, you cheated me!

Yet he had garnered this small victory. He was sitting in the forbidden wicker rocking chair. A throne for the meek. Now meek no longer. For he had come into the legacy of his share of manly earthliness.

He phoned Sheriff Clayce Kidder after he had had two sips of Hortense's private stock of dandelion wine, also forbidden to him until this day. Clayce was out back by the porch steps in a matter of minutes and staring at the corpse.

"Death by accident," he said, and spat a spurt of tobacco juice into the leaves of the puzzle tree by the steps.

Bull cleared his throat to attract Clayce's attention. Clayce ignored him. He was making out a report in a small notebook. Bull laid his hand timorously on the Sheriff's sleeve. Clayce turned and looked down at the little man. Bull was smiling modestly, shyly, proudly. If only Clayce Kidder knew!

"No suspicion of foul play, Sheriff, sir?"

"None whatever, Bull. The top rung of the ladder broke and your wife fell. She struck the back of her head on that wrought-iron footscraper."

Bull persisted, with growing anxiety, his mind whirring with tiny wheels and ratchets like the works of a good gold watch.

"Now, sir—what I mean to say is—" he went on in a soft small stumble of words. "No thought that somebody might have sawed that rung halfway through? Deliberately. So her weight would break it."

He paused, his thoughts moving swiftly.

"Or perhaps waited till she came down," he said. "And struck her across the back of the head with a sharp instrument. Say—well, say, a hatchet?"

Clayce stared, rumors of a smile quivering in the corner of his thin cold lips.

"Now who would do such a thing, Bull Pierson?"

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Bull blushed diffidently. He lowered his eyes shyly. He craved so much to be believed.

"Who?" asked Clayce again.

With considerable effort Bull Pierson lifted his eyes to meet the Sheriff's amused gaze.

"Me."

"You!" roared Clayce Kidder. "You! Oh, great Lord Almighty! *You*? Kill *her*?"

He was staggering with mirth as he climbed the porch steps, slammed the screen door behind him, and left Bull alone with the body. In the distance, as Clayce climbed into his Essex to go back to the courthouse and make out his report and have an ambulance come for the body, Bull could still hear the Sheriff's awful laughter.

"Bull Pierson kill Hortense?" Clayce was shouting. "Oh, my God, wait till I give that one to the boys at the Elks Club tonight!"

There is little more to tell. Sharp as the honed edge of the ceremonial hatchet was Bull Pierson's suddenly wakened awareness that nothing need be changed. He would still murder Hortense. Or was it Hortense he would be murdering as much as himself within her? For is not murder always that? —the shattering of one's own hated image in a living, breathing mirror?

He went indoors after a little while. He had a sip of Hortense's elderberry wine, also heretofore forbidden him. He sat boldly, exultantly again, for exactly three minutes by his Waltham pocketwatch, in the black wicker rocker. Yes, he would murder Hortense. Murder the word "uxorious." He was a proud thing now. A uxoricide. A man.

He said the beautiful word aloud many times in the next few moments as he went to his workshop and reverently unwrapped the hatchet from its velour. He stood a minute staring at it lovingly. He tried the edge with his thumb, cutting himself slightly so that a bead of bright blood appeared. He sucked the blood from the wound and the blood was wine in his veins, wormwood in his brain, the intoxicating blood of a man. He walked thoughtfully, proudly, out to where Hortense's body still lay. He looked down at her, almost lovingly so great was his hatred.

"You thought you'd cheat me," he said. "You thought you'd keep me from killing the thing you've made of me in Glory. Well, we shall see, dear lady, we shall see."

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He stooped then and dabbled the hatchet blade in the clotting pool of gore which had gathered on the flagstones round the dead woman's head. He took the razor edge of the hatchet blade and carefully cut a graying handful of hair from her tresses. He mixed the hair into the thickening blood on the hatchet blade. Then he hid the weapon under the back-porch steps.

He went indoors, picked up the phone, and dialed the courthouse number. It took Clayde Kidder ten minutes to take Bull seriously. Bull told him his conscience had gotten the better of him. He said he had planned the murder for months. He said that he had, despite his wife's pleas for mercy, struck her with the hatchet from his workshop—a fatal blow across the back of the head as she attempted to flee him. Then he had broken the top rung of the ladder to make it look like an accident. Then hid the murder weapon under the porch steps. He finally convinced the Sheriff.

Clayce came back to the house a few minutes later. Just as Bull had said, the bloody hatchet was hidden under the back-porch steps. And it was clotted with Hortense's blood and hair.

Clayce Kidder fussed around a long while out back, for he was a thorough man. Bull sat sipping from a small glass of elderberry wine in one hand and from one of dandelion wine in the other, rocking triumphantly in the black-lacquered, reed-woven chair with the pale flowered cushion and the gay gingham slipcover.

He reflected soberly, calmly, realizing with vast gratification that never again in Glory would the name Bull be used in derision by irate wives against their spouses. Bull was a man. When he heard the screen door close with a twang of its spring and Clayce Kidder snapping open the handcuffs and his big boots drumming through the kitchen to where Bull sat in the parlor, it was the second proudest moment of Bull Pierson's life.

The first proudest moment came on that winter's night five months later when they put the black bag over his head and strapped him into the electric chair.

"Q"

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**a *NEW* detective story by**

**PETER GODFREY**

*Every once in a while a story comes along that has been cast from a unique mold. In this one you are asked to participate in the story as more than a reader. You are asked to join in the investigation of a multiple murder—and that isn't all. You are asked to track down—yourself. . .*

# THE EQMM MYSTERY

## *by PETER GODFREY*

Hundreds of thousands of people will read this story. Nevertheless, directly and personally, it is meant for you—and for you alone.

You who have killed many times—*and do not know you have done so.*

You suffer from dissociation. In lay terms that means you have a split personality. Like Jekyll and Hyde. As Jekyll you are honest, well-meaning, perhaps feeling that you would like to do more with your life. As Hyde you are a killer.

Hyde probably has some idea of the existence of Jekyll. But of one thing I am sure: Jekyll cannot possibly know about Hyde. Otherwise you would have given yourself up.

Let's try a test. Do nothing until you have finished reading these instructions, and then only when I tell you to. Hold your finger to mark your place on this page. Close the magazine only long enough to read the title on the front cover, then turn back. Now!

*ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE.* Was that what you read?

Are you sure?

Are you absolutely positive?

At this point did you feel you ought to check? Did you actually turn back to the front cover?

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Of course this test has a point; we'll come back to that later. At this stage, though, I must stress a psychological axiom, so brilliantly enunciated in Sigmund Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. There is no such thing as a slip of the tongue, or a slip of the eye, or a slip of the pen. What distorts a simple physiological process is always conflict in the unconscious.

I must make a correction. In the first line of this narrative I used the word "story." That was wrong. This is not fiction. Every word is true. Think of it as a problem in detection, with me giving you the clues to enable the honest decent Jekyll in you to build up your own case against the character of Hyde.

Your first victim was Lucy Smith, a six-year-old mongoloid. She lived with her parents and three normal sisters in a small suburban house. Her father, a long-distance truck driver, was away at the time. Her mother, harassed by her other responsibilities, had put Lucy out to play in the back yard. This was a frequent occurrence, and Lucy appeared quite content with the arrangement. But this time, when the mother went to check after an hour or so, Lucy had disappeared. The gate to the yard was open.

Outside was a service alley, which opened onto a quiet street. The neighbors were alerted, and an intensive search got under way. It was still in progress when the police joined in, having been called by the distraught mother.

Soon it was obvious that the child was nowhere in the vicinity. The chances of her having left the area on foot without being observed were remote. This suggested the idea of an automobile, and from here on the police began to look on the case as something more sinister than just a little girl lost. They widened the search. All known sex offenders within reach of the area were rounded up and questioned.

It took three days to find Lucy, and even then the discovery was accidental. A farmer, out with his dog and a rifle, was in a deserted heathland on his property looking for rabbits. The dog drew his attention to a hollow. The body of Lucy was there, loosely covered with brushwood, plucked grass, and wild flowers.

The farmer was sensible enough to touch nothing. He had heard about the missing child, and he knew the odor of death in the open. He ran to the farmhouse and the telephone, where he reported his discovery to the nearest law enforcement officer. He, in turn, phoned Captain Otto Coogan, who had taken over the handling of the Lucy Smith case.

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Captain Coogan—I am going to call him Otto from now on because later we became friends and associates—brought with him a full forensic team, who were able to work on the spot through several bright daylight hours.

The first fact that became obvious was that, apart from the vegetation on the body, no attempt had been made to conceal it. There had been no digging; the corpse had merely been set down in a convenient hollow. The branches, grass, and wild flowers were, as Otto later told me, "Not merely an attempt to hide. There was something about the way they were spread—well, almost like wreaths on a coffin. Sort of floral tributes."

All very poetic, but the facts of the death were grimmer. Lucy had died at just about the time her disappearance had been discovered. She had been strangled from behind with a leather strap about one-half inch wide.

Have you perhaps at some time noticed among your possessions such a narrow strap, and wonder idly why you hang onto something you never use? And still haven't thrown away?

The murder required no great strength, nor was there any positive indication as to the size or sex of the killer. In fact, there was no progress whatsoever in the case for two more days. Even the usual crop of rumors and speculations was missing. Nobody had reported any mysterious strangers; nobody had noticed an automobile suspiciously parked near the Smiths' home. There seemed no motive and no real clues. Otto, who perceived quite clearly the psychological imbalance of the crime, waited almost in dread for further developments.

Three mornings later the first letter arrived. It had been mailed two days before. A plain white envelope had been addressed in careful block letters to the Chief of Police. It was written not in ink but in purple indelible pencil, as was the letter inside. But there was a significant difference. On the envelope, the pencil had been moistened before writing; the cheap notepaper inside had itself been immersed in water, and then written on while still wet. There were no fingerprints.

The writing inside was not in block letters. The graphologist could say no more than that it had been carefully inscribed with a consistent backward angular slope. The writer was either left-handed or a right-handed person using the characteristic left-handed slant to conceal his or her identity.

It was a poem:

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*Thus Nature spake–The race was run,*
*How soon my Lucy's work was done!*
*She died and left to me*
*This heath, this calm and quiet scene;*
*The memory of what has been,*
*And never more will be.*

Otto recognized it from his memories of high school English literature. The name of the girl in the seconed line gave it, under the circumstances, a grim meaning which the poet himself could never have conceived. There could be no doubt, thought Otto, that this sinister missive had come from the murderer of Lucy Smith. At first he thought the selection of that poem was an indication the killer had known the child. But not necessarily so. She may have been a stranger to the killer; the letter could have been sent after the newspapers had printed her name.

On the back, though, was another clue. The paper, wet, had been placed on a magazine as a base for the writing. Fragments of printing had become offset, particularly at those points where writing pressure had been applied. Again experts were called in. Eventually a photograph was taken which showed the outline of portions of lettering. A meaningless jumble, but one kept in case a positive identification could be made at some later stage.

Five weeks after Lucy Smith's murder a story appeared in a local newspaper about a very old woman known to her neighbors as Granny Partridge. She was a character, living alone in a little shack on the outskirts of town. Sharp-tongued and independent, she was given a wide berth by her neighbors. Some were convinced she was over 100; there was a widespread belief that she was some kind of witch. Once a few of the braver kids in the area had followed her, jeering, "Hex! Hex!" She suddenly swung round, chased them at quite an amazing pace, and caught one with a flurry of blows from the walking stick she habitually carried. If anything, this only confirmed the prevailing opinion.

Then one night a couple courting in a car in a dark spot noticed Granny rummaging through trash cans. When she found what she was seeking, she ate it voraciously. The couple in the car, particularly the girl, was overcome with pity. The next morning the pair told their story to the Social Service department.

An officer, a man, went out to Granny's shack. The door was locked and the old lady refused to open it. "Talk?" she screeched. "Unless you got something to tell me about my boy, I got nothing

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to say to you. This is my property and I want to keep it locked. Go away!"

Eventually, frustrated, the man left. Two hours later a woman officer tried her luck. "Open up, Granny," she said. "I'm a friend. I know you're hungry, and I've brought you some goodies."

At this the door was flung wide. Granny, scarlet with rage, snatched the basket and began to throw the contents at the retreating girl. "I don't want food," she yelled. "I want to hear about my boy!"

The next morning the story was in the paper. I remember it particularly because it both amused and evoked pity from my sister Rose. She was having miseries of her own at the time, poor girl, and anything that diverted her merited my particular attention. We discussed it animatedly, wondering what would happen next.

Part of the sequel could have been foreseen, but not all. The following day two officials and a nurse, bolstered by possession of a court order, descended on the shack. To their surprise the door was slightly ajar. They entered. Granny lay on her bed. She was dead.

Otto had had a premonition even before he viewed the body and read the full medical report. She had been strangled with a narrow strap. Her age was given as probably well over 90.

Now that his fear that a homicidal maniac was loose in the district appeared only too true, Otto acted with commendable promptness. He had a long talk with the coroner, pointing out that another strangulation murder so soon after the first one could only cause panic. As a result, the inquest was postponed, and the press told that the death was simply from old age. Otto intensified all his routine procedures. And waited for the arrival of a letter in purple indelible pencil.

It came on the third day after Granny's death. It read:

*Her life was yearning, yearning,*
*In mazes of heat and sound,*
*But for peace her soul was turning,*
*And now peace laps her round.*

Just 18 days later, with a sick feeling of horror, Otto found another letter waiting for him. In it were the usual vaguely familiar lines of a poem:

*This be the grave you verse for me:*
*Home is the sailor, home from the sea,*

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*And the hunter home from the hill.*

This time there was no body associated with the letter. Missing Persons had nobody in their files to whom the poem could possibly apply.

Otto instructed the entire detective force to get in touch with all informants. They were to seek information about a man, one perhaps associated with the sea or hunting, who suffered from some physical or mental disability, and who had not been seen for three days prior to the receipt of the letter.

Identification was almost immediate. On hearing the description, one of the detectives on the vice squad said, "It must be old Skipper."

The man to whom he referred was an ancient wino, a suspected meths drinker, whose days were spent sitting on sidewalks, begging, and whose nights God knew where, in stupefying sleep, covered by a blanket of miasmic fumes from the contents of an empty bottle lying beside him. His real name was John Peel, like the fabled old foxhunter of song, but his nickname had been given because both his arms were covered with bright tattoos of anchors and other nautical symbols. He had not been seen in his usual haunts for some time.

Otto correctly deduced that you must have followed him to his last sleeping place, strangled him with the same weapon, but on this occasion buried him or otherwise disposed of the body.

It was now imperative to learn where and when Skipper had last been seen. Patient and intensified inquiries brought results. Most of Skipper's acquaintances were people who made every effort to avoid talking to the police, but when it was given out that the old man had disappeared and could be dying somewhere alone, a young man came forward. He spent his days, it seemed, "practising" in a pool hall. Every second day or so Skipper would bring him a few coins, and he would buy the old man a bottle of meths. The last occasion had been on the deduced day of the murder. And he indicated Skipper had said something about "the creek" before shambling along the road that led eastward out of town.

There is only one creek in that direction, the banks covered with bushes and threaded by gullies, altogether a likely boudoir for a blind-drunk bum. Otto took 20 men with walkie-talkie radios and probing sticks, and himself directed operations from a car strategically placed on a rise. The men were each given an

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area to search and instructed to look for paths, footprints, a body, or recently disturbed earth.

After nearly an hour a young cop called in excitedly. He had been following what might have been a path down a shallow gully when he came to a spot where the walls on each side seemed to have collapsed. Immediately Otto called the men together, issued shovels, and ordered the spot excavated. After only a few minutes' work it was obvious what they were about to lay bare. As the loose moist soil was shoveled aside, there arose a horrifying odor of meths and death.

Like the other victims, Skipper had been strangled with a narrow strap, probably as he lay in a stupor. Otto, who was vaguely beginning to work on an idea of his own, noted particularly that no great physical strength had been necessary to make the crumbling walls of the gully tumble over to bury the body. Nor need much time have elapsed. Even a small woman could have completed the whole operation from start to finish in ten minutes.

Again Otto had to pull strings to insure that there was no publication of the fact that all the crimes were connected. It was easier with Skipper. Nobody was really concerned as to how he had met his death.

But the situation changed dramatically 15 days later. Young children, playing in a public park, came across the body of eight-year-old Gunnar Sarsen lying on a path. They rushed screaming to a park attendant, who came to see for himself, and then ran to the telephone. When Otto got there twelve minutes later, the little body was still warm.

And then, looking for clues, the police found the bodies of Gunnar's twin seven-year-old sisters, Heidi and Helga. The bodies were not together, but in clumps of bushes some distance apart. In all three cases the murder weapon—still missing—was a narrow strap.

Looking at the corpses, each crowned with bright golden hair like little angels, but with distorted gargoyle faces, Otto felt complete helplessness, even stirrings of panic.

The Sarsen children, he learned, were social misfits. Fresh from Scandinavia, their English was poor and heavily accented. Since pity is an emotion alien to children in groups, the other kids goaded them, imitated them cruelly, and made it quite evident that they were unwanted. The foreigners were a closely knit family, and Gunnar's reaction was to hit out violently at their tormen-

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tors. As a result, the other kids ostracised them and the three Sarsen children took to playing by themselves.

It was easy to reconstruct what had happened. You must have been watching for some time. They were playing a version of hide-and-seek. You waited until Gunnar was "it," and the little girls went out to hide. Then you strangled Gunnar, and took over from him as hunter. Within minutes you had found and strangled Heidi and Helga, and then gone unobserved on your way.

This time, of course, there was a blaze of publicity, but it could have been worse. The horror of the immediate crime was so omnipresent that nobody thought of retarded Lucy Smith or Granny Partridge or Skipper. Otto played his cards close to his chest. Again he managed to conceal the nature of the weapon. He called a press conference and issued a blatant lie. He said clues pointed to the murderer having been a psychopath merely passing through, and that clues were being followed out of town.

In a sense they were. With the next letter from you, Otto wrote in detail asking for aid from the Professor of Psychology at the State University.

Your letter read:

*Fear no more the heat o' the sun,*
*Nor the furious winter's rages;*
*Thou thy worldly task hast done,*
*Home art gone and ta'en thy wages.*
*Golden girls and lads all must*
*As chimney sweepers come to dust.*

Three weeks later I entered the case.

It was evening. I had just finished my third fruitless telephone call to a hospital, and was reflecting on the necessity of informing the police when the front doorbell rang. It was Otto. He introduced himself, and explained that he had been alerted by the first hospital I had phoned. He asked, "This young woman you inquired about, who is she? How long has she been missing?"

I was already alarmed by the fact that the hospital had got in touch with him. "My sister, Rose. And she's been gone for a week. Have you—any news?"

"Why haven't you contacted us before?"

I explained how Rose had said she was going to visit a cousin in another city, and I had only just discovered that she had never arrived there.

Otto hesitated. He said, "I would have come to see you tomor-

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row anyway. The Professor of Psychology at the State University had already suggested I should consult you. But now—" He made up his mind. "Speaking not personally but strictly professionally, do you think this could have any reference to your sister?"

He handed me an oblong of coarse notepaper on which lines of poetry were written, back-sloping, in blue indelible pencil:

*They are not long, the days of wine and roses,*
*Out of a mitsy dream*
*Our path emerges for a while, then closes*
*Within a dream.*

I felt very moved. "Yes. Yes. No doubt about it."

Otto said, "Why?"

"The last word in the first line is an obvious reference to her name. But what makes it certain is the selection of that particular poem. Whoever wrote it must have been observing Rose very carefully for some time. You see, over the last four months, quietly, discreetly, almost imperceptibly, Rose has become an alcoholic."

I told Otto about her marriage, her desire to hold her sadistic husband who was only interested in perpetuating his name through a son, the two miscarriages, the birth of a stillborn daughter, and the husband walking out. "She came to me, of course. We're very close—the only two children in the family. I did what I could to help her, but there was a veil of sadness between us. She could only lift this through alcohol. Is she dead, do you think?"

"Yes," said Otto, "but we are still searching for the body." And then: "I need your advice desperately. But perhaps we should wait until you can be more objective?"

"No, let's talk now. I have been sorrowing for Rose for four months already. Her death is just a final blow. Action will be a sort of relief. I take it there have been other letters, all associated with—death?"

Otto had brought them and we went through them together. The "wine and roses" verse had arrived three days ago, but there was another sent a week before that:

*Here a pretty baby lies,*
*Sung asleep with lullabeis.*
*Pray be silent, and not stir*
*The easy earth that covers her.*

"No body either," said Otto, "and this one I have a feeling we

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shall never find. A buried baby—and no missing child reported. Probably abandoned by its parents, in which case there is no likelihood of it ever being admitted. Probably illegitimate. And it seems to fit the pattern," he said with shrewdness. "All the victims appear to have been social misfits in one way or another."

Thinking of Rose, I winced. But he was absolutely right.

"Why the letters at all?" he went on. "Can there be any sort of rationale? Are they just a crazy random pattern of insanity?"

I shook my head. "Of course there is a meaning. Every activity of insanity, however outré, has a direct relationship with and a pattern dictated by the mental conflicts that have caused the abnormality in the first place."

"I see that. There is this pattern of eliminating misfits. But what are the letters supposed to *do*? A form of epitaph for the victims? Boasting by the murderer?"

"Yes, those things—but over and above them, a cry for help."

I explained that they were another form of the frenzied note so often received by the police in cases of multiple murder: "Stop me before more die." I quoted the letter by the Boston Strangler, and the Jack the Ripper notes to the press. "They are all the same—cries for outside aid from someone who lacks the power to stop himself in a series of compulsive actions, and has too much fear of the consequences to hand himself over to the authorities."

Otto still looked bewildered, so I explained dissociative reactions in some detail. "The first thoroughly investigated case occurred in the nineteen-twenties. The investigator was Dr. Morton Prince, who coined the term 'dissociation.' It is what the layman loosely terms a split personality. Basically, two entirely different characters share the same body. Dr. Prince's theory of cause is that some deeply repressed complex is by shock brought into consciousness—and then rejected so violently that it becomes a separate personality. Dr. Prince also devised a workable cure—a mixture of psychoanalysis and suggestion.

"Dr. Prince's pioneer work has been mainly forgotten these days, but there have been many other cases and other investigators. The most famous of all was reported in 1957 by Thigben and Checkley in a book called *The Three Faces of Eve*.

"This told of a twenty-five-year-old woman who was referred to as 'Eve White,' who consulted a psychiatrist about blinding headaches and fears she would lose the love of a child from whom she had been separated. During the course of the treatment the

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psychiatrist received a note from his patient, in which the handwriting changed completely halfway through, and was unsigned. Eve White denied sending it, and was extremely agitated when the note was discussed.

"Under treatment a second personality who called herself Eve Black was revealed. She was everything that Eve White was not, an extrovert rather than an introvert, cruel and spiteful rather than gentle and long-suffering. Eve Black's great delight was that although she knew all about Eve White, the latter had no idea her secondary personality existed. Eve Black once announced gleefully, 'When I go out and get drunk, she wakes up with the hangover. She wonders what in the hell's made her so sick.'

"Over a long course of treatment both Eve Black and Eve White disappeared, and a new personality, Jane, took over. That is as far as the book goes, but in fact Jane herself had a breakdown after a disastrous second marriage. However, after more intensive treatment she was finally cured.

"Almost every case of amnesia, of compulsive series-killing, is in some way or other a case of dissociation. And just as the tortured Eve drew attention to her fragmented ego by means of a letter, so our killer—or rather, the unconscious part of our killer—is trying to tell us something."

"In God's name, what?"

"We'll find out, never fear. There are other patterns I think I can see, but I must study the letters in more detail first. Will you leave them with me?"

Otto said, "Of course. Come round to headquarters as soon as possible." He hesitated. "But can you tell me one thing? Why the indelible pencil?"

"Probably just because it is indelible. It can't be erased by normal means. But this is theory. When we find our man we'll know more."

"Man?"

"Or woman. There is no conclusive evidence. Nor is there of right- or left-handedness. There are many dissociation cases where the primary personality is right-handed and the secondary left-handed, or vice versa. No, in this case the physical clues are only important as far as they reveal the mind of the killer. I believe the key to the whole case is in the letters."

I found it difficult to sleep that night; in fact, I soon gave up trying and took the letters into my study to see if I could trace

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authorship and origin. They were easy to find. All were in one poetry anthology, and could probably have been found together in half a dozen more. Even though I had not read poetry since my college days, I found them familiar.

By dawn I had analyzed them thoroughly. When I met Otto again at noon, I was able to point out to him the main psychological pattern I had discovered.

Over the next few days we discussed the case exhaustively. Then, while looking at the enlarged photographs of the offset marks on the back of the original letter, I had a sudden perception of spatial relationships. I was sure the backing which had fragmentally reproduced itself on the wet cheap notepaper was a front cover of this magazine, of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.* I am a regular reader and have been for years, so I had a feeling about the size and shape and even the typographical pattern hinted at by the marks. And I knew how we could make sure. Otto thought the whole idea vague, but at least it was something to do.

The laboratory produced for us a clear negative of the marks to exact size. In my garage, under the workbench, I had hundreds of issues of this magazine. Once I had kept them in bookshelves, but as the years went on I transferred them to the large crate in my garage. Month by month, as I finished each issue, I developed the habit of tossing it into the crate. There they all lay higgledy-piggledy.

Unfortunately those at the top were in a dreadful condition, having absorbed the greater part of the contents of an overturned can of lubricating oil. Nothing, however, was going to deter me now. I managed to extract the most recent six issues, carefully sponged them reasonably clean with a detergent solution, then placed the negative over each cover in turn. It was apparent immediately that the size and shape were exactly right. And the third copy we compared left us in no doubt that it was that particular issue that had been used. Every single mark on the negative coincided with print on the cover.

I telephoned the stationery store which put my copies aside for me, and the clerk confirmed that that particular issue had reached the stands about the time Lucy Smith was murdered.

This, I argued, was presumptive proof that the killer was a regular reader. I said, "The odds against a purely casual reader buying this copy at random on the day of issue must be very high.

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When he is a split personality buying it on the day his alternative personality kills a subnormal child, the odds must be astronomical. No, the killer bought it because it was an automatic action on the day of issue. He or she must be a regular reader."

And suddenly Otto became infused with new hope. "At least that's something to work on. I'll contact every newsagent in the district. It might just be possible to get the name of every regular first-day buyer. Certainly it will give us people—possible suspects—who can be questioned. Do you want to come with me?"

"No," I said. "I've just thought of another line to follow."

And, by courtesy of the Editor, here it is—this tale, narrative, call it what you will.

You . . . *both of you.*

I don't know your sex, age, size, coloring, right- or left-handedness. None of these things really matters. But I do know the twists and turns of your mind. I do know you are reading this. I have you captive as an audience, as much in my presence and subject to my influence as if you were physically before me, lying on a couch.

So, let therapy begin . . .

I am now talking to the Jekyll in you. You know nothing of Hyde because he is completely repressed. I can't talk directly to him, not yet, but when I speak to you he will know what I say. First, Hyde does not have to die. Over a period as long or short as his resistance continues, he can learn new philosophies, new motivations, be modified—but he certainly will not be destroyed.

And I want one thing clearly understood. This is not a confidence trick. I mean every word I say. Nor do I have any personal desire for revenge. I can't bring Rose back to life. All I can do is fulfill a promise I made to her years ago that I would see she is cremated. *And you are going to help me find her body.*

Let me point out one thing to both of you: the key to your joint personalities is *transposition.* When you are Jekyll, Hyde is your unconscious. Transposed, Hyde has control, Jekyll becomes repressed. In both cases the unconscious personality makes its presence known by causing inexplicable errors and slips. By transposition.

First, let's take the letters sent, in all cases, with Hyde in full control. Distinct major patterns emerge. All the poems are well-known and much anthologized lines on the general theme of death. Each of the verses has some distinct reference to the vic-

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tim. In the case of Lucy Smith, Wordsworth's poem gives the name and has a specified reference to the heath where the body was found. Matthew Arnold's *Requiescat* makes play on the word "yearning," which seems to describe Granny Partridge's feelings for the mysterious boy she was anxious about.

The lines chosen for Skipper were R. L. Stevenson's own epitaph, carved on his grave in Samoa. Skipper was tattooed like a sailor, and his real name was John Peel, more usually associated with hunting. And he was the only victim found in a grave. The fair-haired "golden" Sarsen children are quite clearly referred to in Shakespeare's Requiem from *Cymbeline*. I have already spoken about the aptness of Dowson's verse as a choice for Rose. The "pretty baby" in Herrick's poem has implications we can only guess at.

But the most important pattern was the transposition that crept into all the verses. In Rose's case you wrote "mitsy" instead of "misty"; with the baby, "lullabies" became "lullabeis." These were the last two received, and were simple and obvious letter transpositions. Was this so, Jekyll, because we seemed to have missed your previous cries for help?

Yes, there were transpositions in the other poems, more subtle, more indicative of your total helplessness. Let's take them in order.

Lucy Smith: The original poem reads "Thus Nature spake—The work was done, How soon my Lucy's race was run." You wrote "Thus Nature spake—The race was run, How soon my Lucy's work was done."

Granny Partridge: Arnold actually wrote "Her life was turning, turning, In mazes of heat and sound, But for peace her soul was yearning, And now peace laps her round." You transposed "turning" and "yearning."

Skipper: The first line of the epitaph is "This be the verse you grave for me," not "This be the grave you verse for me."

The Sarsen children: Shakespeare wrote "Golden lads and girls all must." You transposed this into "Golden girls and lads all must."

Now even you must be conscious of that mechanism in your mind.

So it is time again for our test. Mark your place, and then move only when I tell you. The same as before—flip over for a quick look at the title on the front cover, then turn back. Ready? Now!

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*ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTREY MAGAZINE.* Is that what you read?

Are you sure?

You still don't see, do you?

Look at the spelling of "*MYSTERY*." Look again. Yes, this time I spelled it "*MYSTREY*." Perhaps you did notice, but put down the transposition of letters to a typographical error.

*It can't have been.* Remember the Freudian axiom: there is no such thing as a slip of the tongue, or a slip of the eye, or a slip of the pen.

You—the better side of you—make your call for help through the transposition of words and letters. That means not only are you unconscious of these mistakes when you write them, you also do not notice them *when you read them back.*

Your attention was on transpositions. I called on you for a second test. I deliberately made your own usual mistake. *And you did not notice it.*

Think. What can it mean? What *must* it mean?

Even though you have no conscious recollection of the killing, *you must be guilty.* So go now. Give yourself up. Prevent more deaths.

No, don't argue. Don't rationalize. The facts are quite clear. When I wrote "*MYSTREY*" it was done *deliberately.* I made no unconscious silp of the pen.

*Silp*? Oh, oh, hurtling down a spiral staircase of associations—all the lonely ones—the mongoloid burden, the deserted old woman, the half-human wino. Rose cremated to peace in the incinerator . . .

Clear now. All crystal-clear.

You are—*me.*

"Q"

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**a *NEW* short story by**

**RUTH RENDELL**

*A tale of two sisters named May and June because they were born in those months—a tale of hate and love, of misery and happiness, of despair and hope. . . Ruth Rendell is masterly at this kind of story—she feels the heartbeats of her characters, and she can make you feel them too. Reading one of her stories is like having your finger on someone's pulse. . .*

# THE STRONG AND THE WEAK

**by *RUTH RENDELL***

Their parents named them May and June because their birthdays occurred in those months. A third sister, an April child, had been christened Avril but she had died. May was like the time of year in which she had been born, changeable, chilly and warm by turns, sullen and yet to know and show a loveliness which could not last.

In the 1930s, when May was in her twenties, it was still important to get one's daughters well married, and though Mrs. Thrace had no anxieties on that score for sunny June, she was less sanguine about May. Her older daughter was neither pretty nor graceful nor clever, and no man had ever looked at her twice. June, of course, had a string of admirers.

Then May met a young lawyer at a *thé dansant*. His name was Walter Cheney, he was extremely good-looking, his father was wealthy and made him a generous allowance, and there was no doubt he belonged in a higher social class than that of the Thraces. May fell passionately in love with him, but no one was more surprised than she when he asked her to marry him.

The intensity of May's passion frightened Mrs. Thrace. It wasn't quite "nice." The expression on May's face while she awaited the coming of her fiancé, her ardor when she greeted him, the hunger in her eyes—that sort of thing was all very well in the cinema,

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but unsuitable for a customs officer's daughter in a genteel suburb.

For a brief period she had become almost beautiful. "I'm going to marry him," she said when cautioned. "He wants me to love him, doesn't he? He loves me. Why shouldn't I show my love?"

June, who was clever as well as pretty, was away at college, training to be a schoolteacher. It had been considered wiser, long before Walter Cheney had appeared, to keep May at home. She had no particular aptitude for anything, and she was useful to her mother about the house. Now, of course, it turned out that she had an aptitude for catching a rich, handsome, and successful husband. Then, a month before the wedding, June came home for the summer holidays.

It was all very unfortunate, Mrs. Thrace said over and over again. If Walter Cheney had jilted May for some other girl, they would have been bitterly indignant, enraged even, and Mr. Thrace would have felt old-fashioned longings to apply a horsewhip. But what could anyone say or do when Walter transferred his affections from the older daughter to the younger?

May screamed and sobbed and tried to attack June with a knife. "We're all terribly sorry for you, my darling," said Mrs. Thrace, "but what can we do? You wouldn't marry a man who doesn't love you, would you?"

"He does love me, he does! It's just because she's pretty. She's cast a spell on him. I wish she was dead and then he'd love me again."

"You mustn't say that, May. It's all very cruel to you, but you have to face the fact that he's changed his mind. Isn't it better to find out now than later?"

"I would have had him," insisted May.

Mrs. Thrace blushed. She was shocked to the core.

"I shall never marry now," said May. "She's ruined my life and I shall never have anything ever again."

Walter and June were married, and Walter's father bought them a house in Surrey. May stayed at home, being useful to her mother. The war came. Walter went straight into the army, became a captain, then a major, finally a colonel. May also went into the army, where she remained a private for five years, working in some catering department. After that there was nothing for her to do except to go home to her parents once more. . .

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May never forgave her sister.

"She stole my husband," she would remind her mother.

"He wasn't your husband, May."

"As good as. You wouldn't forgive a thief who came into your house and stole the most precious thing you had or were likely to have."

"We're told to forgive those who trespass against us, as we hope to be forgiven."

"I'm not religious," said May, and on those occasions when the Cheyneys came to the Thrace home she took care to be absent. But she knew all about them—all, that is, except one thing.

Mr. and Mrs. Thrace were most careful never to speak of June in May's presence, so May listened outside the door, and she secretly read all June's letters to her mother. Whenever Walter's name was mentioned in a letter, or spoken, she winced and shivered with the pain of it. She knew that they had moved to a larger house, that they were building up a collection of fine furniture and valuable paintings. She knew where they went for their holidays and what friends they entertained. But what she was never able to discover was how Walter felt about June.

Had he ever really loved her? Had he repented of his choice? May thought that perhaps, after the first flush of infatuation was over, he had come to long for May as much as she longed for him. Since she never saw them, she could never know, for, however he might feel, Walter couldn't leave June. When you have done what he had done—what June had made him do—you can't change again. You have to stick it out till death.

It comforted May—it was perhaps the only thing that kept her going—to convince herself that Walter regretted his bargain. If there had been children—what the Victorians called pledges of love. . . Sometimes, after a letter had come from June, May would see her mother looking particularly pleased and satisfied. And then, shaking with dread, May would read that letter, terrified to learn that June was pregnant. But Mrs. Thrace's pleasure and satisfaction must have come from some other source, from some account of Walter's latest *coup* in court or June's latest party, for no children came and now June was past 40.

Trained for nothing, May worked as a canteen supervisor in a women's hostel. She continued to live at home until her parents died. Their deaths took place within six months, Mrs. Thrace dying in March and her widower in August. And that was how it

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happened that May saw Walter again.

At the time of her mother's cremation, May was ill in bed with a virus infection and unable to attend. But she had no way of avoiding her father's funeral. When she saw Walter come into the church, a faintness seized her and she pushed against the pew rail, trembling. She covered her face with her hands to make it seem as if she were praying, and when at last she took them away Walter was beside her.

He took her hand and looked into her face. May's eyes met his, which were as blue and compelling as ever, and she saw with anguish that he had lost none of his good looks, but had become only more distinguished-looking. She would have liked to die then, holding his hand and gazing into his face.

"Won't you come and speak to your sister, May?" said Walter in the rich deep voice which charmed juries, struck terror into the hearts of witnesses, and won women. "Shall we let bygones be bygones on this very sad day?"

May shivered. She withdrew her hand and marched to the back of the church. She placed herself as far away from June as she could, but not too far to observe that it was June who took Walter's arm as they left and not Walter who took June's; that it was June who looked up at Walter for comfort while his face remained grave and still; that it was June who clung to him while he merely permitted the clinging. It couldn't be that he was behaving like that because she, May, was there. He must hate and despise June, as May, with all her heart, still hated and despised her sister.

But it was at a funeral that they were reconciled.

May learned of Walter's death by reading an announcement of it in a newspaper. And the pain of it was as great as the one she had suffered when her mother had told her he wanted to marry June. She sent flowers, an enormous wreath of snow-white roses that cost her half a week's wages. And of course she would go to the funeral, whether June wanted her there or not.

Apparently June did want her. Perhaps she thought the roses were for the living bereaved and not for the dead. She came up to May and put her arms round her, laying her head against her sister's shoulder in misery and despair.

May broke their long silence. "Now you know what it's like to lose him."

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"Oh, May, May, don't be cruel to me now! Don't hold that against me now. Be kind to me now, I've nothing left."

So May sat beside June, and after the funeral she went back to the house where June had lived with Walter. In saying she had nothing left, June had presumably been referring to emotional rather than material things. Apart from certain stately homes she had visited on tours, May had never seen anything like the interior of that house.

"I'm going to retire next month," May remarked, "and then I'll be living in what they call a flatlet—one room and a kitchen."

Two days later a letter came from June:

"Dearest May: Don't be angry with me for calling you that. You have always been one of my dearest, in spite of what I did and in spite of your hatred of me. I can't be sorry for what I did because so much happiness came of it for me, but I am truly, deeply sorry that you were the one who suffered. And now, dear May, I want to try to make up to you for what I did, though I know I can never really do that, not now, not after so long.

"You said you were going to retire and wouldn't be living very comfortably. Will you come and live with me? You can have as many rooms in this house as you want—you are welcome to share everything with me. You will know what I mean when I say I feel that would be just. Please make me happy by saying you forgive me and will come. Always your loving sister, June."

What did the trick was June saying it would be just. Yes, it would be justice if May could now have some of those good things which were hers by right and which June had stolen from her along with her man. She waited a week and then she wrote:

"Dear June: What you suggest seems a good idea. I have thought about it and I will make my home with you. I have very little personal property, so moving will not be a great bother. Let me know when you want me to come. It is raining again here and very cold. Yours, May."

There was nothing, however, in the letter about forgiveness.

And yet May, sharing June's house, was almost prepared to forgive. For she was learning at last what June's married life had been.

"You can talk about him if you want to," May had said hungrily on their first evening together. "If it's going to relieve your feelings, I don't mind."

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"What is there to say except that we were married for forty years and now he's dead?"

"You could show me some of the things he gave you." May picked up ornament after ornament, gazed at paintings. "Did he give you that? What about this?"

"They weren't presents. I bought them or he did."

May couldn't help getting excited. "I wonder you're not afraid of burglars. This is a proper Aladdin's Cave. Have you got lots of jewelry too?"

"Not much," said June uncomfortably.

May's eyes were on June's engagement ring, a poor thing of diamond chips in nine-carat gold, far less expensive than the ring Walter had given his first love. Of course she had kept hers, and Walter, though well off even then, hadn't been rich enough to buy a second magnificent ring within six months of the first—not with all the expenses of furnishing a new home. But later, surely. . . ?

"I should have thought you'd have an eternity ring."

"Marriage doesn't last for eternity," said June.

May could tell June didn't like talking about it. June even avoided mentioning Walter's name, and soon she put away the photographs of him which had stood on the piano and on the drawing-room mantelpiece. May wondered if Walter had ever written any letters to his wife. They had seldom been parted, of course, but it would be strange if June hadn't received a single letter from him in 40 years.

So the first time June went out alone, May tried to open her desk. It was locked. The drawers of June's dressing table disclosed a couple of birthday cards with *Love from Walter* scrawled hastily on them, and the only other written message from her husband June had considered worth keeping May found tucked into a cookbook in the kitchen. It was a note written on the back of a bill, and it read: *Baker called. I ordered a large white bread for Saturday.*

That night May reread the two letters she had received from Walter during their engagement. Each began "Dearest May." She hadn't looked at them for 40 years—she hadn't dared—but now she read them with calm satisfaction.

"Dearest May: This is the first love letter I have ever written. If it isn't much good you must put it down to lack of practise. I miss you a lot and rather wish I hadn't told my parents I would visit them on this holiday. . ."

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And "Dearest May: Thanks for both your letters. Sorry I've taken so long to reply, but I feel a bit nervous that my letters don't match up to yours. Still, with luck, we soon shan't have to write to each other because we shan't be separated. I wish you were here with me. . ."

Poor Walter had been reticent and shy, unable to express his feelings on paper or by word of mouth. But at least he had written love letters to *her* and not notes about loaves of bread. May decided to start wearing her engagement ring again—on her little finger, of course, because she could no longer get it over the knuckle of her ring finger. If June noticed, she didn't comment on it.

"Was it you or Walter who didn't want children?" May asked one day.

"Children just didn't come."

"Walter *must* have wanted them. When he was engaged to me we talked of having three."

June looked upset, but May could have talked of Walter all day long. "He was only sixty-five," she said. "That's young to die these days. You never told me what he died of."

"He needed an operation," said June, "and never regained consciousness."

"Just like mother," said May. Suppose June had had an incurable disease and had died—what would have happened then? Remembering Walter's tender look and strong handclasp at her father's funeral, May thought he would have married her. She twisted the ring on her little finger. "You were almost like a second wife, weren't you? It must have been a difficult position."

"I'd much rather not talk about it," said June, and with her handkerchief to her eyes, she left the room.

May was happy. For the first time in 40 years she was happy. She busied herself about the house, caring for June's things, dusting and polishing, pausing to look at a painting and reflecting that Walter must have often paused to look at it too. Sometimes she imagined him sitting in this chair or standing by that window, his heart full of regret for what he might have had with May. And she thought how, while he had been longing for her, she, far away, had been crying for him. She never cried now, though June did, often.

"I'm an old fool. I can't help giving way," June sobbed. "You're strong, May, but I'm weak and I miss him so."

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"Didn't I miss him?"

"He was always fond of you. It upset him a lot to think you were unhappy. He often talked about you." June looked at her piteously. "You *have* forgiven me, haven't you, May?"

"As a matter of fact, I have," said May. She was a little surprised at herself. But, yes, she had forgiven June. "I think you've been punished for what you did." A loveless marriage, a husband who talked constantly of another woman. . .

"I've been punished," said June, and she put her arms round May's neck.

The strong and the weak. May recalled that when a movement downstairs woke her in the middle of one night. She heard footsteps and a wrenching sound as of a door being forced. It was the burglar she had always feared and had warned June about, but June would be cowering in her room now, terrified, incapable of taking any action.

May put on her dressing gown and went down the passage to June's room. The bed was empty. She looked out of the window, and the moonlight showed her a car parked on the gravel driveway that led to the lane. A yellower, stronger light streamed from the drawing-room window. A shiver of fear went through her, but she knew she must be strong.

Before she reached the head of the stairs she heard a violent crash as of something heavy yet brittle hurled against a wall. There was a cry from below, then footsteps running. May got to the stairs in time to see a slight figure rush across the hall and slam the front door behind him. The car started up.

In his wake he had left a thin trail of blood. May followed the blood trail into the drawing room. June stood by her desk which had been torn open and all its contents scattered onto the table. She was trembling, tearful, and laughing with shaky hysteria, pointing to the shards of cut glass that lay everywhere.

"I threw the decanter at him. I hit him and cut his head and he ran."

May went up to her. "Are you all right?"

"He didn't touch me. He pointed that gun at me when I came in, but I didn't care. I couldn't bear to see him searching my desk, getting at all my private things. Wasn't I brave? He didn't get away with anything but a few pieces of silver. I hit him and then he heard you coming and he panicked. Wasn't I brave, May?"

But May wasn't listening. She was reading the letter which lay

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›pen and exposed on top of the papers that the burglar had pulled ›ut of the desk. Walter's handwriting leaped at her, weakened hough it was, enfeebled by his last illness. "My darling love: It is ›nly a minute since you walked out of the hospital room, ıevertheless I must write to you. I can't resist an impulse to write ıow and tell you how happy you have made me in all the beauti-ul years we have been together. If the worst comes to the worst, ny darling, and I don't survive the operation, I want you to know ›ou are the only woman I ever loved. . ."

"I wouldn't have thought I'd have had the courage," said June, but perhaps the gun wasn't loaded. He was only a boy. Would ›ou call the police, please, May?"

"Yes," said May. She picked up the gun.

The police arrived within 15 minutes. They brought a doctor vith them, but June was already dead, shot through the heart at lose range.

"We'll get him, Miss Thrace, don't you worry," said the Inspec-or. "It was a pity you touched the gun, though. Did it without hinking, I suppose?"

"It was the shock," said May. "I've never had a shock like that, ıot in the last forty years."

"Q"

**NEXT MONTH**

36th Anniversary Issue!

15 NEW stories — including

**GEORGES SIMENON** (about a man from out there)

**MICHAEL GILBERT** (about Inspector Petrella)

**EDWARD D. HOCH** (about Dr. Sam Hawthorne)

**ROBERT L. FISH** (about one of the oldest con games)

**CELIA FREMLIN** (about a case of maximum need)

**LAWRENCE TREAT** (a police procedural)

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**a *NEW* Pierre Chambrun story by HUGH PENTECOST**

*Pierre Chambrun, manager of the Beaumont, New York City's top luxury hotel, is the benevolent despot of his private domain. His word is law, and he knows—or gets to know—everything that happens in the hotel, from a peccadillo in service to an attempted murder; and he deals with each situation as a detective, and when necessary, as judge and jury.*

*The detective and judicial process is seldom a leisurely affair. In this newest case a woman in the hotel has only four to six hours to live, and finding her, and the person threatening her life, is searching for a "needle to end all needles in a haystack" . . .*

# CHAMBRUN AND THE MATTER OF INCHES

**by HUGH PENTECOST**

Dr. Oliver Partridge has been the house physician at the Hote Beaumont for a great many years. Now, in his late seventies the good doctor has given up all private practice and devotes him self solely to the emergencies generated in the Beaumont. An there are emergencies, for the giant hotel is like a city in itsel with its own hospital, its own police force, its own shops and bar and restaurants, its own top man. That top man—mayor, man ager, whatever title you choose for him—is Pierre Chambrur something of a legend in his own time. Chambrun's word is law a the Beaumont, and there is rarely a successful appeal from hi decisions because he is rarely if ever wrong.

One of the decisions he had made, over the gentle suggestior offered by some of his staff including me, his public relation genius, was to keep Doc Partridge on as house physician instead c getting a younger, more vigorous, more medically up-to-date mai

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Chambrun explained to me why he chose to go along with Dr. Partridge.

"People here in the hotel, Mark, are away from home," Chambrun said. "If they need a doctor they are apt to be panicked by a stranger. They need their own doctor, their trusted doctor—back home. A young man with all the modern equipment and gadgets, ready to pump them full of something from a hypodermic, would be scary. Old Doc Partridge reminds them of the family doctor in their childhood. He's an aspirin and a hot-lemonade-spiked-with-bourbon doctor. He relaxes them and gets them back to their own doctor for a serious verdict.

"They trust him, and his instincts are worth twenty years of a more modern medical education. If we have a dead guest on our hands, a suicide, a heart-attack victim, Doc can sign a death certificate with the best of them. If he ever loses a patient through incompetence I'll turn him out to pasture. But he never has, and I don't think he ever will. I like his image."

I wondered if Chambrun knew that the old doctor didn't have quite as much confidence in himself as Chambrun had in him. I don't know why I wondered, because I am convinced Chambrun knows everything about everyone who works for him.

There was a day, however, when Doc Partridge came to me with a problem instead of going to Chambrun, and I realized then that he didn't want Chambrun to know age was finally catching up with him.

He came to my office on the second floor, just down the hall from Chambrun's plush quarters. My name is on the door: MARK HASKELL, PUBLIC RELATIONS. Doc Partridge, his white hair rumpled, his dark eyebrows drawn together in a scowl, sat down in the chair beside my desk.

"Damnedest thing," he said.

I grinned at him. "You lost at backgammon," I said.

He growled at me. The Doc spends most of his free time in the Spartan Bar just off the main lobby. This is one of the last bastions of male chauvinism in the city—no women allowed. A lot of old gentlemen sit around playing backgammon or chess, complaining that their joints ache, and indulging in memories of a nostalgic past when, if they whistled at a young girl, she could be expected to pay attention. Doc Partridge was a wizard at backgammon and I guess his winnings provided a handsome supplement to the salary the hotel pays him.

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"It'll happen to you, smart aleck!" the Doc said. "First some o your teeth will go; then your eyesight will bother you; then ar thritis will begin to cripple you. Finally, your hearing—" He let i rest there.

"I love you, Doc," I said. "I love to hear you tell how you onc removed an appendix with a pair of dressmaker's shears. But thi is a busy morning. If you have a problem would you mind gettin to it?"

"Damnedest thing," he said again. "I was sitting in a booth i the Spartan, next to the corridor leading to a washroom—"

"Rolling somebody to death with the backgammon dice."

"I was alone," he said. "Game over. Took forty bucks from ol man Crowder." He looked away. "I was napping. At my age yo can snatch forty winks anytime there's an opportunity. I came ou of my nap and heard voices. One was very clear, very British. On was muffled. I couldn't make it out. But the British voice wa quite distinct. You won't believe what it said."

"Try me."

"The man with the British voice said, 'The lady's wine at dinne tonight will be poisoned. A very subtle poison. She will die of a apparent heart attack, and that old crock of a doctor will neve suspect that he's got a murder on his hands.' Then the tw laughed, and I couldn't hear any more. Their voices were low ered."

I felt a cold finger run along my spine. "So who were they?" asked.

The doctor shook his head. "Damned old fool," he said. "It wa so far out I—I didn't take it seriously. I thought someone wa playing a joke on me, that 'old crock of a doctor.' I waited two o three minutes, hoping they'd try something else on me. Whe there wasn't anything more, except the low voice, indistinguish able, I got up and went around to the booth on my right. That' where the voices had come from—where I thought they had com from.

"There were two of those Mid-Eastern United Nations peopl sitting there, jabbering away at each other in what I supposed was Arabic. They smiled at me and went on talking to each other Now—now I could have sworn the voices I heard had come fro that booth, but there could have been something about the acous tics, something about my damned hearing which may be failing."

His voice became bitter. "I went around to the booth on my left

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It was empty, but someone had obviously just left. There was a check lying in a saucer with the money on top of it. I hailed Armand, the waiter. He said two men had just left that booth. They weren't regular customers. He might recognize them if he saw them again. One of them had been wearing a fancy corduroy jacket, so I ran out into the lobby. No corduroy jacket. And that's that.

"But, damn it, Mark, someone's planning to kill a woman at dinner tonight. It has to be here in the hotel or they wouldn't be counting on that 'old crock of a doctor' to miss the truth about it."

"We'd better talk to Chambrun," I said.

Chambrun is a short square man with bright black eyes buried in deep pouches. Those eyes can reflect many moods—laughter, compassion, anger. When anger takes over, Pierre Chambrun can look very much like a hanging judge.

He listened to Doc Partridge's story, sitting behind his carved Florentine desk in his luxurious office, eyes narrowed, the smoke from an Egyptian cigarette curling up around his dark head. Before the Doc had finished he had pressed a button on his desk and spoken into the intercom box.

"Get Jerry Dodd here on the double," he said.

Jerry Dodd is head of the hotel's security force. In another age he would have been called the house detective. In a hotel like the Beaumont the job is far more complex. Jerry, a former F.B.I. agent, is a wiry, tough, highly efficient operator.

When Jerry had heard Doc's story, told over again at Chambrun's request, he swore softly under his breath.

"Over a thousand women will dine somewhere in this hotel tonight," he said. "Seven hundred and fifty of them will drink wine. The needle to end all needles in a haystack. Where do we start?"

"I still think it may have been a practical joke on me," Dr. Partridge said. " 'That old crock of a doctor.' The man in the corduroy jacket and his friend are probably laughing themselves sick over my taking their gag seriously."

"At least those two are a starting point, Jerry," Chambrun said. "Someone besides Doc's waiter, Armand, may have noticed them and be able to identify them. Try that. And find out who the two Arabs were in the other booth."

"You could close down the bars and refuse to serve any wine to anyone at dinner," I said.

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"You have to be kidding," Jerry said.

"If it's for real they'd simply wait till tomorrow to kill their woman," Chambrun said.

"I was kidding," I said. "Let's pray it was a joke on the Doc."

"Amen," Chambrun said.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon. If it wasn't a joke some woman had four to six hours to live.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when I got a summons to report to Chambrun's office. I'd spent some time hoping to find someone in the lobby, a bell captain, a desk clerk, who might have seen Doc's man in the corduroy jacket. Johnny Thacker, the day bell captain and a see-all-know-all kind of sharpie, remarked that there were dozens of corduroy jackets around this time of year.

"I did see a guy come out of the Spartan," Johnny told me. "Not a regular. But there was something familiar about him. An actor, maybe. I could have seen him on television."

That was the sum of my success as I headed for Chambrun's office in answer to his summons. Jerry Dodd was with the boss, along with a motherly looking woman whom I knew to be Mrs. Kniffin, one of the chief housekeepers. She looked to be in a mild state of shock.

Chambrun was sunk into his desk chair, his eyes narrow slits. "Tell Mark what you've just told us, Mrs. Kniffin," he said.

She told it as if she didn't believe it could possibly have happened. She had been in the linen room on the 14th floor when the phone rang.

"I answered," Mrs. Kniffin said, "but I seemed to have gotten onto some kind of crossed line. I could hear someone talking, but he couldn't hear me when I said 'Hello' several times. And then I—I listened. It sounded like an Englishman talking. He was saying, 'When she drinks the poisoned wine she will keel over. Her boyfriend will assume it's a heart attack and call for the hotel doctor. He'll also assume it's a heart attack. But the law requires an autopsy and the poison will be detected. Then we'll have our man by the short hairs.' "

Mrs. Kniffin swallowed hard. "I kept saying hello, hello, but in the foul-up of the line he obviously couldn't hear me. So—so I came here to report to Mr. Chambrun."

"If we're lucky," Chambrun said, his voice cold and angry, "we

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have about three hours before this unknown lady drinks her poisoned wine. No way to trace that crossed-up line, Jerry?"

Jerry Dodd shook his head. "I don't even know how it could happen," he said.

"Maybe it didn't," Chambrun said.

"Oh, Mr. Chambrun," Mrs. Kniffin wailed. "You don't think I'd invent such a—"

"Of course not," Chambrun said. "I haven't told you that this is the second time someone's overheard a conversation about this threatened lady. Strike you as odd, Jerry?"

"In what way?" Jerry asked.

"A murder scheme talked about so loudly in the Spartan Bar it could be overheard in the next booth; a crossed telephone line going through a switchboard where any conversation might be overheard. Someone may have called Mrs. Kniffin and pretended the line was crossed."

"Wanted her to hear what she heard?" Jerry asked.

"And wanted Doc Partridge to hear what he heard."

"That's crazy!"

"Wanted us to stop something and pin an attempted murder on someone. 'Then we'll have our man by the short hairs.' "

"Someone to be framed for an attempted murder that we prevent?" Jerry asked.

"As you said," Chambrun said, "crazy. And yet—"

"Why call Mrs. Kniffin?" Jerry asked. "I mean, why Mrs. Kniffin as opposed to someone else?"

"We are being led around by our noses," Chambrun said. "Mrs. Kniffin presides over the 14th floor. Could that be where our lady dines—and wines?"

Guests at the Beaumont would be astonished at how much is known about them, their habits, their backgrounds, their daily conduct in the hotel. Information about them comes from employees on every level and is poured into a computer which is, in reality, Chambrun's brain. Oh, there are index cards, and files, and alphabetized comments, but they come together at Chambrun's office on the second floor.

"When I don't know what's going on in my hotel it will be time for me to retire," Chambrun has said many times. He gets to know the financial standing of his guests, whether they are alcoholics, whether a husband is cheating on his wife, or a wife on

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her husband, their politics if they are members of the United Nations family, many of whom consider the Beaumont their home-away-from-home. He knows whether guests want privacy, or, if they are actors or politicians, they want publicity. They get what they want.

By five o'clock that afternoon Chambrun's many sources of information had produced certain facts that seemed relevant to our problem. Mr. Atterbury, the chief daytime desk clerk, had identified the man in the corduroy coat. He was a British actor named Galway, in New York to rehearse a new play. Definite British accent. The two Arab gentlemen in the booth from which Doc Partridge had first thought he'd heard the talk about the lady destined to die were Abba Fayed and his secretary, U.N. personnel from Lebanon. Abba Fayed had been educated at Oxford. He had a pronounced British accent, if he chose to speak English.

Room service supplied us with what seemed to be vital information. A lady named Mrs. Mathilda Carrington had a small suite on the 14th floor. She was part of the secretarial staff of the British delegation to the U.N. She dined every night in her suite with a male companion. The gentleman turned out to be Dr. Reginald Symonds, a scientific advisor to the British delegation to the U.N. who had a room on the 7th floor.

There was an oddity about Mrs. Carrington's nightly dinner order. It never involved liquor or wine, but it did include ice, a highball glass, a siphon of soda, and a wine glass. The assumption was that Mrs. Carrington kept her own liquor and wine supplies in her suite.

A night maid reported that after the room-service waiter had removed the nightly dinner dishes, a DO NOT DISTURB sign was hung on the door of the Carrington suite. The maid was never able to go in to turn down the bed. This was reported to Mrs. Kniffin in case there should be a complaint. It suggested that Mrs. Carrington and Dr. Symonds might be involved in something more intimate than a discussion of the day's doings at the U.N. after they had finished their dinner.

It fitted like a glove, Chambrun thought. There were two ways the lady's wine could be poisoned—by Dr. Symonds or by someone who had access to the suite at an earlier time of the day. It had bothered Chambrun from the start how the wine could be poisoned in one of the public restaurants or even in Room Service. He trusted his staff down to the last busboy and dishwasher. Mrs.

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Carrington's setup made the poisoning quite possible. But by whom? Her lover, Dr. Symonds?

I think I suggested that. I usually do set up the first target for Chambrun to shoot down.

"You're not remembering what Mrs. Kniffin heard," he said. " 'When she drinks the poisoned wine she will keel over. Her boy friend will assume it's a heart attack and call for the hotel doctor. But the law requires an autopsy and the poison will be detected. Then we'll have our man by the short hairs'."

"So Dr. Symonds is the intended victim?"

"One of two victims, it would seem, since Mrs. Carrington is to be killed first."

"It's too far-fetched," I said. "It's just as far-fetched as English voices talking about a murder to be committed—talking loud enough for everyone to hear."

"Not everyone, Mark—just Dr. Partridge and Mrs. Kniffin, both of whom were certain to come to me. So they did, so it's my move. So what am I certain to do? Warn the lady that she's in danger, make certain she isn't poisoned by her dinner wine." Chambrun brought his hand down flat on his desk so that an ashtray jumped. His eyes were cold as two newly minted dimes. "Which is exactly what they *want* me to do!"

"So Mrs. Carrington isn't intended to die?"

"But someone is to be framed for the attempt and I am supposed to help make that frame work. I'm going to nail someone to the barn door for this, Mark. Nobody plays games with me!"

It was a little before six when Chambrun rang the doorbell to Mathilda Carrington's suite. I was with him. Jerry Dodd had been sent on errands. I hadn't heard Chambrun's instructions because I'd been sent to fetch the files on Mrs. Carrington and Dr. Symonds. The files told us that Mrs. Carrington was a widow. Her husband, a test pilot for the British Air Force, had been killed in a crash two years ago. Dr. Symonds was married to the daughter of a high British foreign-office official. It appeared the good doctor was not observing his marriage vows in the strictest sense.

Mathilda Carrington answered the ring at her door after a rather long delay. She was wearing a loose-fitting yellow housecoat. What can I say except that she was a gorgeous dish—a natural blonde with a lush figure and deep violet eyes. I had seen her before in the lobby without knowing who she was. Let me say

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that normally I would have made inquiries about her the first time I laid eyes on her. But I have an instinct about women. I can tell if they're available. But this girl had a special thing about her, an aura, that told me that she belonged, totally, to some man. I had made note of it, regretfully. Dr. Symonds was a lucky guy, I told myself, looking at her.

She had looked annoyed when she opened the door, but her expression relaxed. "You're Mr. Chambrun, aren't you?" An attractive British accent. The hotel was full of them these days, it seemed.

"I am, Mrs. Carrington. And this is Mark Haskell, a trusted member of my staff."

"Is something wrong?"

"I'm very much afraid so," Chambrun said. "May we come in and talk to you about it?"

She stood aside and gestured us in. As I stepped past her I was aware that her perfume was exactly right for her, subtle, provocative. The small sitting room, decorated by the hotel with English hunting prints, had personal touches that you don't see in a transient guest's room. There were some beautiful little carved ivory pieces on the fireplace mantel, some family photographs on the table behind the couch; a needlework tapestry in its frame was tossed carelessly on one of the chairs. Mathilda Carrington lived here; she wasn't just passing through. Probably for the duration of the meeting of the U.N. General Assembly.

"I hope it can be brief, Mr. Chambrun," the lady said. "I'm expecting a guest for dinner, and as you can see, I'm not yet dressed."

"Dr. Symonds?" Chambrun asked casually. He appeared to be looking at the family pictures.

I saw color mount in her cheeks. "Are you here to discuss my dinner guest, Mr. Chambrun?" she asked.

"Not as a dinner guest," Chambrun said. "What I have to tell you is pretty shocking, Mrs. Carrington. We have reason to believe that someone has planned to kill you tonight."

The violet eyes widened, the red lips parted. "You must be out of your mind!" she said, after a beat. "Who on earth. . . ?" The question faded away.

"Before we explore the 'who,' Mrs. Carrington, it's most important we investigate the 'how.' I understand that when you and Dr. Symonds dine together, you provide the whiskey and wine. What

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is it, Scotch for Dr. Symonds and a burgundy for you?"

"How did you know?" she asked.

"Room service reports that you order the glasses, the ice, the siphon of soda, but no whiskey or wine. May I see the wine you propose to serve tonight?"

"Really, Mr. Chambrun, I think this is—"

"It may be the difference between living and dying," Chambrun said, so gravely that she had to react.

She went over to the sideboard and brought back a bottle of wine, only half full. She handed it to Chambrun. He took it, held it up to the light. "Chateau Margaux, '66," he said. "An excellent choice." He pulled the cork and sniffed the contents of the bottle, frowning. Then he held it out to me.

"Take this down to the clinic, Mark. The chemist is waiting to run some tests on it. Then stop by the main dining room and have the wine steward give you a bottle of Chateau Margaux '66. Have him empty out enough so that it looks exactly like the bottle you're carrying. Please hurry, Mark."

So it was that I didn't know just how he broke it to her, just how much he told her, or what she told him. I delivered her bottle to the waiting pharmacist, then went to the main dining room where I replaced it with a fresh bottle, emptied to the same level as hers had been. The whole process took ten or twelve minutes.

The lady was sitting on the couch, her fingers locked together, when I got back to the suite. She looked pale as death. Chambrun stopped what must have been a restless pacing of the room.

"Ah, good work, Mark," he said. He took the bottle over to the sideboard and placed it where the original bottle had been.

"You were saying, Mrs. Carrington?" Chambrun said. "Don't be concerned about Mark. He will know everything that I know, sooner or later."

"I can't believe it," the lady said. "There simply isn't anyone who would want to take my life."

"And if our pharmacist's analysis comes up poison?"

"God help me, I still couldn't explain it."

"Let's begin with the fact that you are having an affair with a married man," Chambrun said.

Color rushed back into the lady's face. "That is no concern of yours, Mr. Chambrun! My private life—"

"May produce the motive for an attempt on your life."

"But Mrs. Symonds is in London! How could she—?"

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"You can buy killers in this day and age. The going rate is anything from fifty dollars to ten thousand. I mention your affair with Dr. Symonds because we can't brush it under the rug. There is a second avenue to explore. Your job with the British delegation to the United Nations. Do you know something that is dangerous to someone there?"

She sat frowning for a moment. "Nothing so dangerous that I would be killed for it. There is an agent for the Lebanese people who has tried to buy information from everyone in sight. He has approached me; he also approached Reggie—Dr. Symonds. Naturally we turned him down. But kill me for refusing? It doesn't make sense."

"His name," Chambrun said.

"Abba Fayed."

"Why, he's the man—" I started to say.

"I know, Mark," Chambrun said, cutting me off.

Abba Fayed was Doc Partridge's Arab, Oxford educated, who had been in the next booth in the Spartan when the doctor had overheard the talk about a lady to be poisoned.

"One last thing, Mrs. Carrington," Chambrun said. "Has Dr. Symonds been trying to break off his relationship with you?"

Her lower lip was caught between very white teeth. "Not in the way you mean," she said finally. "His—his political position is tied into his marriage, his father-in-law's power and prestige. He feels he has to stay with his marriage—as a patriotic duty—for a while. For too long, from my point of view. I—I love him, Mr. Chambrun. I have begged him to give it up. We could go anywhere, have each other, forget about politics and power, and—and raise chickens!"

"Have you threatened him? Suggested you would go to his wife?"

"Yes, I suppose I have—in hysterical moments. But of course I wouldn't."

"Is Dr. Symonds certain you wouldn't?"

Her eyes widened. "Oh, my God, are you suggesting that Reggie might be the one who—?"

"We touch all bases," Chambrun said.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried out.

At that moment there was the sound of a key in the front door lock and a tall, blond, handsome man, in his mid-thirties I thought, let himself into the suite. He had to be Dr. Symonds. He

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looked surprised to find his lady with company. He looked more surprised and shocked when he got a sketch of the situation from Mrs. Carrington. She was half laughing, half crying when she got to the end. Chambrun had just suggested that he, Dr. Symonds, might be the poisoner, determined to keep Mrs. Carrington from exposing his affair with her.

"My God, Mat, you don't believe that?" he exclaimed.

"No! No!"

And she was in the doctor's arms, sobbing hysterically.

The phone rang. Chambrun was closest to it and he answered. It was evidently for him. He listened, and his face went rock-hard.

"I'm sorry to break up this moment of reassurance," he said, "but that was our pharmacist. There was enough poison in that half bottle of wine, Mrs. Carrington, to kill three horses. I'm going to have to ask you both to come down to my office with me while our security people go over this suite for fingerprints."

It was no game. It was no practical joke. Mathilda Carrington had been a very short time away from a violent and agonizing death. Dr. Partridge had been a very short time away from making an excusable but wrong diagnosis of heart attack.

I was surprised when we reached the boss's office on the second floor to find a collection of people waiting for us. Doc Partridge and Mrs. Kniffin were there; and there was a handsome young man in a corduroy jacket, and a very short, dark-skinned little man with a Mephistophelian mustache and beard and a very white smile.

The white smile disappeared from his face when he saw Mrs. Carrington and Dr. Symonds.

"I don't care to be in the same room with these people, Mr. Chambrun," he said, in a crisp Oxford accent. "I'm sorry."

"I must ask you to stay, Mr. Fayed, just for a few moments," Chambrun said. I saw that Jerry Dodd had materialized and was standing with his back to the office door. There was no way out for Mr. Fayed.

"As all of you know, or have been told," Chambrun said, "a threat against Mrs. Carrington's life was heard twice today, once by Dr. Partridge in the Spartan Bar, once by Mrs. Kniffin on the fourteenth floor over a crossed telephone. On both occasions the voice was British-sounding. In Dr. Partridge's case we know that Mr. Fayed was in the booth to his left, and Mr. Galway here"—

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and Chambrun indicated the smiling young man in the corduroy jacket—"in the booth to his right. Now I am going to ask you, Mr. Fayed, and you, Mr. Galway, to read a few words for me, like actors auditioning. The words are, 'She will die of an apparent heart attack, and that old crock of a doctor will never suspect that he's got a murder on his hands.' "

Galway gave it a fine melodramatic reading, smiling all the time. Then it was Fayed's turn. He provided us with a colorless monotone. Chambrun waited for Doc Partridge and Mrs. Kniffin to react. Both of them looked puzzled and uncertain.

"Dr. Symonds, would you read the words for us?" Chambrun asked. "It would give us another British voice. It might help the doctor to adjust his memory."

"I was, of course, at the United Nations all afternoon," Symonds said.

"Of course," Chambrun said amiably.

Dr. Symonds read the words.

Doc Partridge made a growling sound. "I'm sorry, Pierre. All British voices sound a little alike. I couldn't be certain."

"Of course, I heard it on the phone, which distorts voices anyway," Mrs. Kniffin said.

"No identification, then?"

"Sorry."

"No, Mr. Chambrun."

Chambrun nodded, as though he wasn't surprised by the failure of his plan. Mr. Fayed, glaring at the Britishers, started to leave again.

"Just one more moment, Mr. Fayed," Chambrun said. He glanced at Jerry Dodd. "Your turn, friend."

"Well, we found the poison exactly where you expected, Mr. Chambrun," Jerry said. "In the handkerchief drawer in Dr. Symonds' bureau."

"What in God's name—!" Symonds exploded.

"There's a drugstore label on the bottle," Jerry said. "I inquired. The poison, not easy to come by, was bought by Dr. Symonds who had all the right credentials."

Mathilda Carrington, who had been resting in the protective circle of Dr. Symonds' strong right arm, wrenched away from him, a look of horror on her face.

"This is some kind of bloody frameup!" Symonds shouted.

"I'm halfway inclined to agree with him," Jerry Dodd said. "You

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see, boss, I asked the drugstore man if he could identify Dr. Symonds if he saw him again. He was sure he could—a dark-skinned man, he said, Arab perhaps, with a black mustache and a black beard. That hardly describes our blond Dr. Symonds."

Every eye in the room was suddenly focused on Mr. Fayed. His black eyes were glittering like a snake's. "I don't know how this was managed," he said, "but someone is going to pay for it, dearly!"

"We can wrap it up, boss," Jerry said. "I have the drugstore man outside to make an identification."

"Bring him in," Chambrun said. He had taken the chair behind his desk, heavy lids almost hiding his eyes, a small cold smile moving his lips.

Jerry brought in a nondescript gray little man wearing gold-rimmed spectacles. He looked steadily at Mr. Fayed. Then he turned to Jerry. "This man looks very much like Dr. Symonds," he said, "but he isn't the Dr. Symonds who bought the poison."

"How can you be sure?" Jerry asked.

"This is a very short man," the pharmacist said. "My Dr. Symonds was much taller. As tall as"—he waved casually at the real Dr. Symonds—"as tall as you, sir. Not you, sir, but as tall as you."

"Thank you," Chambrun said. Then he leaned forward in his chair. Now he was the hanging judge. "And so, lady and gentlemen, the charade is over." He took one of the flat Egyptian cigarettes from the box on his desk. He lit it with a gold lighter and the pale smoke curled up around his face. It was almost like a theatrical effect.

"Let me give you a lesson in geography to begin with," he said. 'In the Spartan Bar there is a narrow corridor leading to the washroom. It runs directly behind the booth in which Dr. Partridge was sitting. The words the doctor heard need not have been spoken in the booth in which Mr. Fayed sat, or the one in which Mr. Galway and his friend sat. It could have been someone in that narrow corridor standing directly behind the doctor.

"There is a second fact of importance. Mrs. Kniffin thought she had got on a crossed wire. I don't think so. I think she was called directly, and the person on the other end read his lines, pretending not to hear her hellos."

He leaned back a little, and I could see the muscle ripple along the line of his jaw. He was an angry man. "I can follow a trail as

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well as the next man," he said, "particularly when it is cluttered with signposts and pointing arrows.

"Consider: I was expected to believe a murder was planned. I did.

"I was expected to believe it would take place on the fourteenth floor because of Mrs. Kniffin's involvement. I did.

"I was expected to be clever enough to go to my room-service people and learn Mrs. Carrington's drinking habits. I did.

"I was expected to warn her and find the poisoned wine. I did.

"I was expected to think Dr. Symonds was the villain. I did.

"I was expected, when he opened Mrs. Carrington's door with his own key, to accept the fact that he had access to the wine and could easily poison it. I did.

"I was expected to send someone to his room to look for the poison. I did. I sent Jerry and he found it.

"I was expected to check the label on the bottle and arrive at an identification of Mr. Fayed. I did.

"But our friend here from the drugstore spoiled the carefully laid plot. It was a matter of inches."

"Inches?" I heard myself ask.

"Nine inches, I would say. Mr. Fayed is about five feet six. Dr. Symonds is about six feet three. A good nine inches. Mrs. Carrington and Dr. Symonds counted on a simple fallacy. All cats look alike in the dark. Most Orientals look alike to most Occidentals. Dr. Symonds' careful makeup was expected to satisfy the drugstore man. But there was a matter of nine inches."

"An incredible pipedream," Dr. Symonds said, his voice harsh. "You can't prove a single word of it, Chambrun."

"I know," Chambrun said, undisturbed. "But I've known from the start that I was meant to follow the trail I was following, exactly as I did. It would lead, elaborately, to Mr. Fayed. Why the whole complicated scheme? I can only guess. Mrs. Carrington and Dr. Symonds needed money if he was to abandon his rich wife and all that her position held for him. I suspect that they've been selling political secrets, so that— Was it really to be a chicken farm, Mrs. Carrington? I suspect Mr. Fayed, who plays his own clever power games, had found out they've been selling secrets and was blackmailing this charming couple. So, as you said, Dr. Symonds, you resorted to a 'bloody frameup'."

"Not a single iota of this is provable," Symonds said.

"I know. No point in my going to the police. You will all claim

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diplomatic immunity. But I will pass on to your respective governments what I know. Maybe they will believe what you tell them; maybe they will believe what I tell them. But what matters most to me is that in exactly one half hour you will all be out of my hotel and you will never set foot in it again. Your dirty games don't fit our way of life here. Get them out of here, Jerry, and stay with them till they're out on the sidewalk, bag and baggage."

Chambrun and I were finally alone with Dr. Partridge. The old man was shaking his head.

"Don't worry about your hearing, Doctor," Chambrun said. "If you'd remembered the corridor behind your booth—"

"You knew all along?" Doc said.

"The trail was too easy to follow," Chambrun said. "I knew when I came to the end of it I would have the wrong answer—if I believed the 'evidence.' So I stopped believing. Mrs. Carrington wasn't in danger; she knew her wine was poisoned—she may have poisoned it herself. Dr. Symonds wasn't going to be framed for the murder of his lady love; he was too busy fitting a frame around Mr. Fayed. All the reverse of what appeared to be the obvious."

He smiled his Cheshire-cat smile. "I never trust anything that comes that easy, Doctor."

## "Q"

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